



Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University

# From Playgroups to Prisoners' Families

A study of voluntary sector children and families services in Manchester



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## Introduction: background, context and aims

The Community Audit and Evaluation Centre (CAEC) at Manchester Metropolitan University was commissioned by the Child and Family Support Forum to undertake an initial audit of voluntary sector child and family services across Manchester. This audit aimed to illustrate the voluntary sector's involvement in and contribution to supporting children and families. It is of necessity an initial snapshot, rather than a comprehensive picture, and this report includes recommendations for continuing work in this area.

The research also aimed to highlight important current issues for voluntary sector organisations working in the field of children and families, to identify ways to strengthen the voluntary sector and to enhance the potential for effective partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sectors. The importance of strengthening multi-agency and cross-sectoral work to prevent harm to children and young people assumed an increasingly high profile nationally and locally during the course of the research. This area of work was therefore a focus for discussions of partnership working.

Much of what we know about voluntary sector children and families work in Manchester derives from practical experience and knowledge which is not systematically recorded. The importance of this audit lies in its underlying premise: that in order to plan our future contribution to children and families' work, those of us working in the voluntary sector need a clear picture of what we are all doing.

This has been an ambitious undertaking and yet a tentative first step to building a body of evidence about the importance of voluntary sector provision and the needs of those organisations providing services.

There have been no great surprises: much of what is recorded is already known. We hope that this piece of research will contribute to culture change within the sector so that we put more effort into gathering evidence of what we know and of why our work is important. We have invaluable knowledge about how to support many different kinds of children and families, including some of the most vulnerable. We owe it to them to ensure that our knowledge is used and shared.

**Win Greenhalgh & Veronica Marris**

## Notes and Acknowledgements:

The audit was carried out between February and November of 2003. It was funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and supported by the Community Network for Manchester.

Thanks to the following people, who all contributed to the compilation and analysis of the information in this report and to the development of the database: Charlotte Jones, Barrington Reeves, Catherine Shaw, Jessica Strode-Willis, Damien Tolan and Danielle White.

Many thanks are due to the organisations and groups who took the time to answer questionnaires and take part in telephone interviews and especially to those who contributed to focus group discussions. We hope that the information gained is useful to those who took part and to other organisations who are working to support children, young people and families.

The database which was set up during the course of the research project is now the property of the Child and Family Support Forum.

12<sup>th</sup> January 2004 .

## Summary: key findings and recommendations

### **Information Provision (see pp 11-12 in the report)**

1. People are an essential tool in information provision. Posts should be identified at city-wide and local levels with responsibility for collating and sharing information about children and family services. People in this role will need the capacity to do outreach and networking in their area to ensure that they include as many groups as possible.
2. The Child and Family Support Forum, Voluntary Action Manchester and relevant people in statutory services should work together to develop and use the database set up through this research in the most appropriate way. In order to maximise existing resources it is important that information providers work together and that information provision is rationalised as far as possible.

### **Strengthening the Voluntary Sector (see pp 11, 13 & 14)**

3. Resources continue to be needed to support and strengthen networks within the voluntary sector. Human resources are an essential part of this. Voluntary sector organisations, in particular smaller ones, need high quality events which will provide opportunities to learn from one another through sharing skills and experience. Voluntary sector organisations need their own forum.
4. Statutory agencies could support skills and knowledge development in the voluntary sector by offering training and resources such as venues, transport or childcare as appropriate.
5. The voluntary sector in particular needs to explore ways to improve its capacity to evaluate and promote its own work, both as individual organisations and collectively.
6. Voluntary sector organisations involved in children and family work, as in other areas, need capacity-building support in areas such as management, planning and fund-raising.

### **Cross-sector Partnership Working (see pp 16-19)**

7. Partnerships, whether formal (such as Sure Start programmes) or informal, must be organised in ways which take account of constraints on capacity within the voluntary sector. Practical details such as **timing, venue, transport, childcare and food** are very important when organising events and meetings. Part-time staff and volunteers are often attending in their own time and therefore should be supported in practical ways and made to feel valuable.

8. **Communication** is the key to effective joint working. Statutory agencies need to find ways to develop or buy in communication skills in order to maximise their effectiveness when working with users and community organisations. **Presentation, language, accessibility, format and timing** of information are important as well as personal attitudes and communication skills.
9. The unique contributions of each sector should be recognised and supported. The voluntary sector is important because of its grassroots, local knowledge, relationships with users and capacity for trying new ideas and taking risks. Voluntary organisations cannot and should not be expected to operate in the same ways as statutory services.

#### **Preventing Harm to Children & Young People (see pp 20-21)**

10. Statutory and voluntary sector workers need training and learning opportunities to enhance their effectiveness in working together for the best outcomes for children and young people at risk of harm (**see training recommendation below**). Both sectors need better understanding of the role, contribution and capacity of the other.
11. Better referral routes are needed between voluntary and statutory agencies. These will be supported by good information and partly on good working relationships.
12. Many statutory agencies need training and support to enhance their confidence in dealing with information sharing issues. Workers are reluctant to share information with voluntary agencies. Confidence in using and understanding relevant legislation (in particular Data Protection) is more of a problem than the actual legislation itself.

#### **Training (see pp 14 and above section)**

13. The statutory and voluntary sectors in Manchester should work together to create sustainable, joint training programmes organised at a local level in order to raise skill and knowledge levels in both sectors, increase mutual knowledge and understanding and promote practical, cross-sector working relationships. Statutory services such as Early Years and Play and the Youth Service have a track record of providing free training to voluntary organisations. Similarly many larger voluntary organisations with specialist knowledge (e.g. Partners of Prisoners, Manchester Adoption Society and many others) have experience of providing training to statutory workers. These foundations could be built on at local level to very good effect.

## Stage One of the research - gathering basic information

The first stage of the project involved researching sources of information and contacts for community and voluntary sector organisations providing services to children, young people and families in Manchester. Contacts from existing directories and other sources were put onto a database. Organisations on the database were invited to complete a questionnaire about their organisation and also about their training and support needs.

Ninety-two (92) organisations were involved in this first stage of the research (**questionnaire and database**). A further sixteen (16) groups and organisations were contacted either at the end of stage 1 (through the **local snapshot** exercise described below) or during stage 2 of the research (**focus groups and telephone interviews**) as described below.

A total therefore of **108** organisations responded in some way to the research project. A further **165** organisations were included on the database and will have received one or more mailings during the course of the research. They will therefore be aware of the Child and Family Support Forum's work in this area and of the aims of the research project.

### The Database

A database of voluntary sector groups and organisations was set up, based on the Child and Family Support Forum's mailing list. It has been updated and added to using the Voluntary Action Manchester and GMCVO directories as well as information from other sources (see below). There are currently **273** organisations on the database (see above).

### The Questionnaire

A one-page questionnaire was distributed to organisations on the mailing list at an early stage of the project. Fifty-one (51) organisations or groups completed the questionnaire by means of a short telephone interview and a further forty-one (41) returned it by post. The information gathered from this exercise and now held on the database is as follows:

- contact name, address, postcode, phone number, email address
- contact with research project
- level of funding
- numbers of staff and volunteers
- types of activity and service
- target client group
- local or city-wide project

In addition organisations were asked for information on their **training and support needs**, what was already available to them and what needs were not being met. They were also asked about whether or not they were already aware of the **Child and Family Support Forum** and those who took part in a telephone questionnaire were asked about their **awareness of the local preventative strategy** and whether they saw this as relevant to their work.

#### Collection of additional information about groups and services:

Requests for additional contacts were made through various routes. Information was received in the form of local directories, informal phone conversations or emails and local websites and electronic directories from:

- Sure Start programmes from around the city
- The Children's Fund programme
- Early Years & Play list of summer playschemes
- Manchester Libraries database
- Community Chest and Community Learning Chest list of grants

#### 'Local Snapshot' exercise:

This was an attempt to gather more detailed information at a local level by visiting and telephoning organisations in specific areas and asking them for information about other groups and services in the area. The areas originally selected were Clayton, Rusholme/Fallowfield and Old Moat.

Sure Start Clayton provided a very detailed directory of local organisations (which have been added to the database). This proved useful and effective as a source of contacts for recruiting focus group participants during stage two of the research and that process also revealed good local networking and information sharing between organisations in the area.

The Rusholme/Fallowfield exercise has contributed most to the findings of Stage one of the research. It proved hardest to collect information about provision in Old Moat. Eight (8) organisations were contacted in Old Moat and in Rusholme/Fallowfield who had not previously participated in the research. Some of these were medium-sized rather than very small organisations, demonstrating that personal contacts and sustained follow-up are needed in order to gather good information and obtain participation in information sharing.



## Description of organisations involved in the research:

### *Nature of the groups and organisations contacted:*

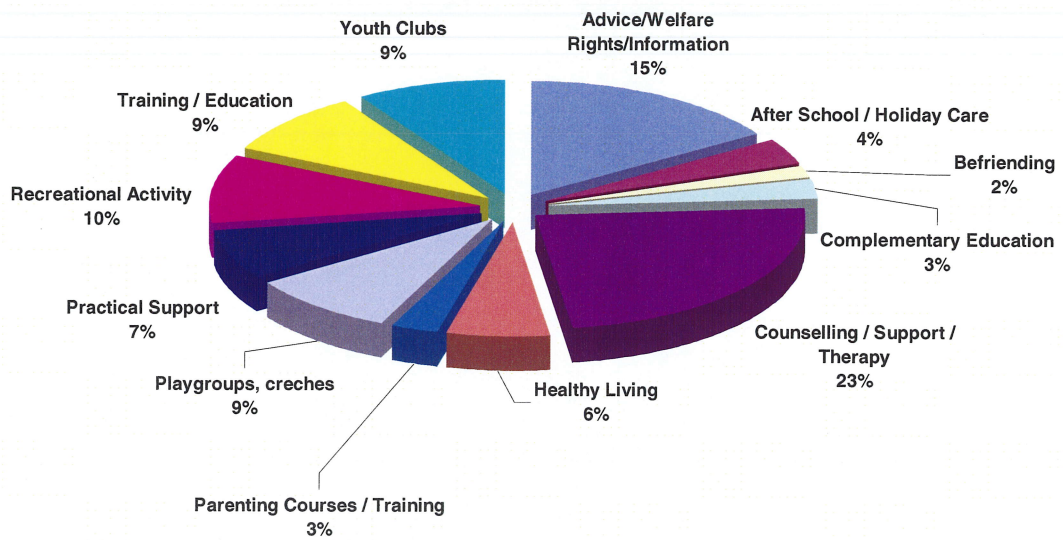
The groups and projects that are now on the database comprise a wide range of types and size of organisation. They include some as small as individual playgroups; larger, local community organisations and citywide projects dealing with specific issues. There is a good geographical spread across the city, but there are more organisations from areas where we held a focus group or received good local information, for instance through a Sure Start programme.

### *What do all these organisations do?*

Services provided by the responding organisations include the following:

- playgroups and crèches
- adult and toddler groups, coffee mornings, other social groups
- after-school clubs, childcare and holiday playschemes
- befriending schemes
- advice, welfare rights, advocacy
- signposting, information and referral to other services
- counselling, therapy and support groups
- health information, complementary therapies and sexual health advice
- courses on childcare, parenting, confidence building, managing behaviour
- learning through play courses, parent & school courses
- vocational training, IT courses, language classes
- free or cheap furniture or clothing
- alternative education and supplementary schools
- youth clubs and activities
- **large-scale specialist services such as:** running prison visitor centres, adoption and post-adoption services, leaving care service, supported housing

Activities of Organisations



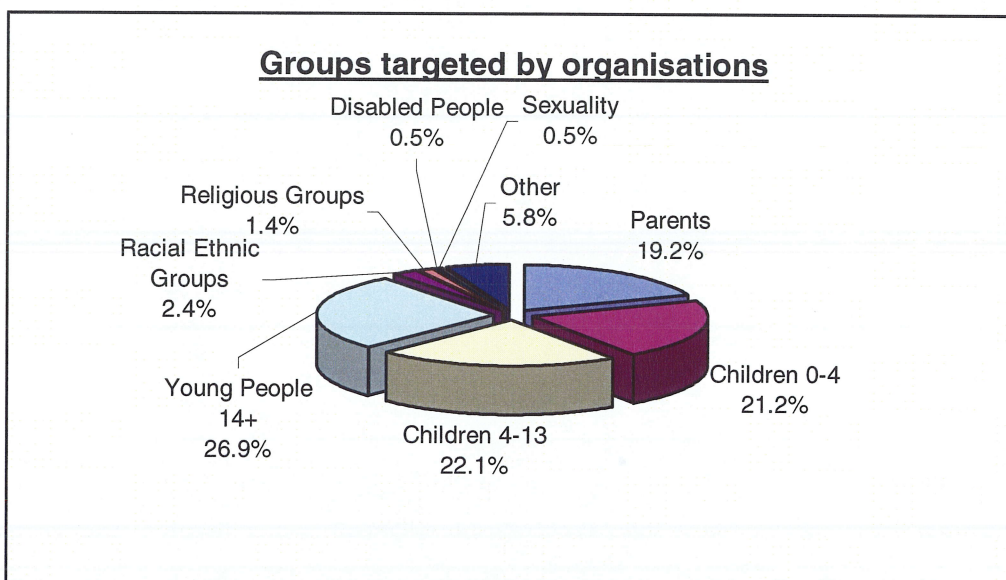
### *Who are the services provided for?*

These are the various different groups of parents and carers, children and young people who use these services:

- Pre-school and school age children
- Young people
- Parents, grandparents and other carers
- Single parents and young parents
- People from black and ethnic minority communities
- Asylum seeking and refugee families and children
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual young people and their families
- Vulnerable young people, such as homeless young people, those involved in crime or leaving care
- Prisoners' partners and children
- Adoptive parents, adopted children and birth parents of adopted children
- Disabled children, disabled parents and their families
- Children with caring responsibilities
- Families of children with special educational needs
- Children excluded from school or at risk of exclusion
- Families in deprived areas of the city
- Parents of children with drug problems
- Parents with mental health problems

The chart below shows that the audit was successful in reaching groups who provide services for groups such as people from particular racial, cultural or religious backgrounds or for disabled people.

The response from organisations providing services solely or predominantly to people from black and ethnic minority communities was fairly good (around 15% of both the original 92 responding organisations and of the final total of 108). Black and ethnic minority organisations tend to be less well-resourced than white organisations but have become increasingly involved in networks and forums in recent years.



Given Manchester's diversity there will be many more organisations and groups to be contacted in future. In particular churches and other religious groups often provide important social and practical support to families and this audit probably does not reflect the true scale of these activities.

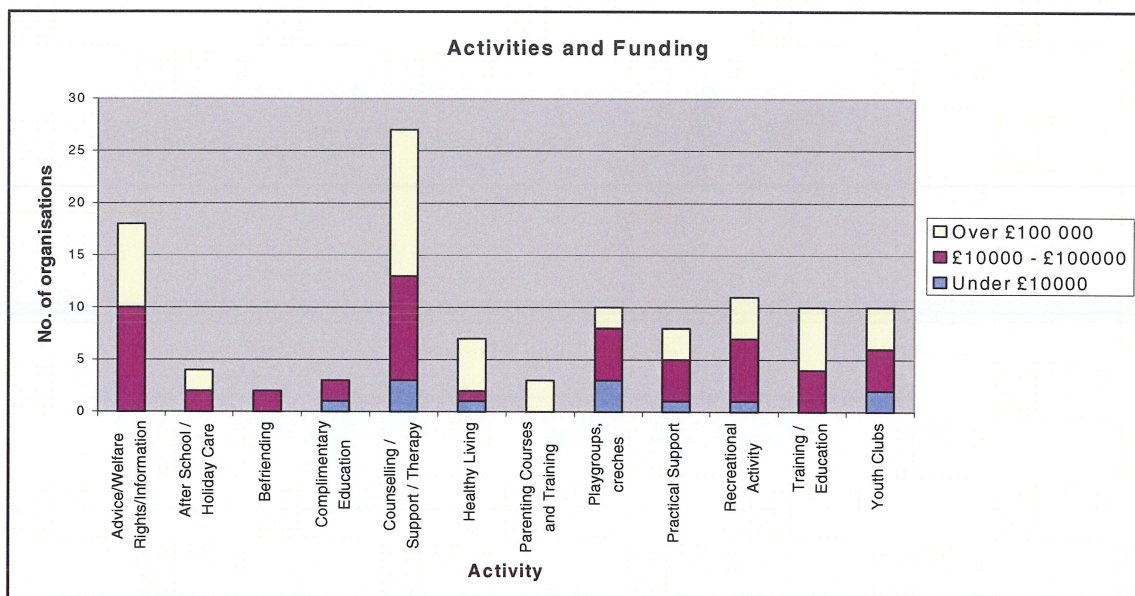
Only 6 organisations providing services for disabled people and/or their families responded to the audit. However there are many more organisations in this field not yet included in the database and further research or information would be useful.

**Levels of staffing and volunteering**

Total Full-time Staff (among 92 organisations)	Total Part-time Staff	Total Volunteers
<b>443</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>1,614</b>

The table above shows a total of 777 paid staff and 1,614 volunteers among the 92 responding organisations, who represent **only one third** of all those on the database. In addition there are still more organisations not yet on the database. Even allowing for the fact that these latter include many smaller organisations and groups with few or no paid staff, it would be reasonable to assume that the figures above represent **less than half** of the total number of paid staff and volunteers in organisations in this field across Manchester. This gives some idea of the size of the voluntary sector contribution to children and families work in the city.

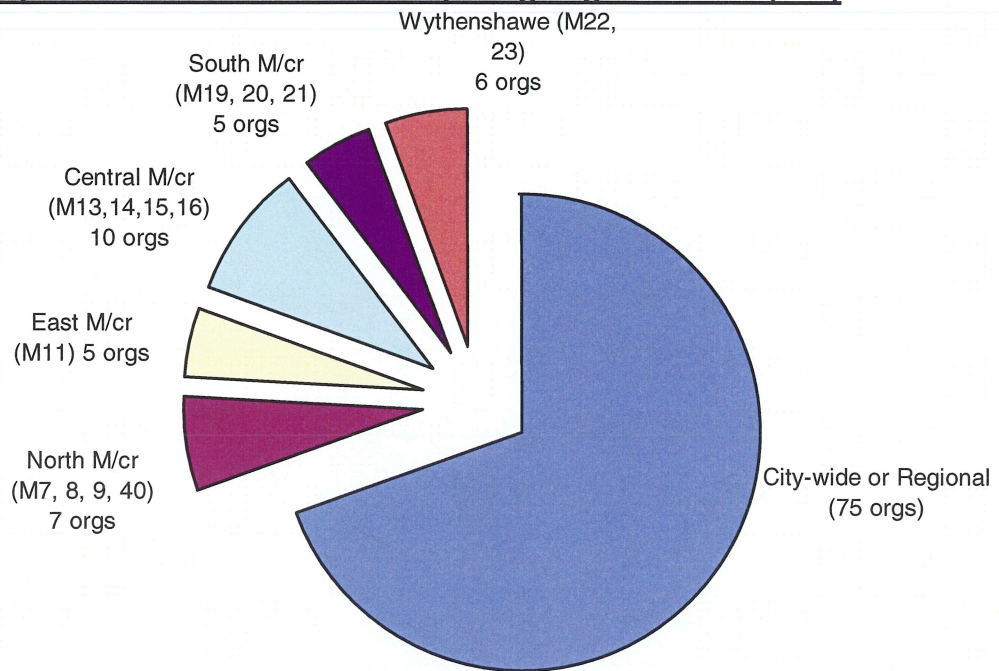
**Size of organisations contacted: illustrated by levels of funding**



Organisations with funding of under £10,000	Organisations with funding between £10,000-£100,000	Organisations with funding of over £100,000
12% (11)	40% (37)	46% (43)

It is not surprising that it was easier to get a response from larger organisations than from very small ones. When contacting organisations by phone it became clear that a significant number of organisations do not have an office that is permanently staffed. There was a wide variation in staffing levels, some organisations having no paid staff and others having as many as 25 full-time or 45 part-time staff.

**Geographical Distribution of Participating Organisations (108)**



## Stage Two of the research:

### voluntary sector needs; voluntary and statutory sector partnerships; networking; preventative work

The aim of the second stage of the research was to gather more detail from in-depth discussions with a smaller number of organisations. This was achieved through running three focus groups, attended by 19 organisations, and by a further five telephone interviews lasting around 20-30 minutes.

The key areas for discussion in the groups and in the telephone interviews were positive and negative factors currently affecting children and families work in the voluntary sector and aspects of working in partnership with other voluntary sector organisations, but particularly with the statutory sector.

#### Focus Groups:

Three focus groups were held in Beswick, Burnage and Wythenshawe over two weeks in September and attended by 18 people (representing 19 organisations). A fourth group was scheduled to be held in Cheetham but was cancelled due to insufficient numbers. Focus group participants were recruited by telephone requests to organisations that had expressed an interest via the questionnaire and through a mailing to 80 selected organisations on the database. Selected organisations included those local to the arranged venues and some citywide, specialist projects or those working with under-represented groups.

#### In-depth telephone interviews:

Five telephone interviews were held with organisations providing specialist services or services to under-represented groups. Originally there were to have been a substantial number of face-to-face interviews but pressures on time and resources made this impossible.

The organisations that gave interviews all had close working relationships with statutory agencies; in two cases were providing statutory services (adoption and leaving care services) and in two others were contracted to provide significant services (support for families of children with learning difficulties and managing prison visitor centres).

#### Participants in this stage of the research

The majority of organisations who took part in the focus groups had been contacted through the questionnaire or local snapshot exercise. Eight (8) organisations participated in this stage of the research that had not done so at an earlier stage (5 in focus groups and 3 in telephone interviews).

The focus groups involved respectively 6 (Burnage), 7 (Wythenshawe) and 5 (Beswick) participants, who took part in the following:

- Group conversation about examples of good work
- Exercise in pairs/groups on aspects of partnership working
- Brainstorm on the voluntary sector and preventative work

Participants in the telephone interview were asked about partnership working, about the main current issues affecting their work and about networking with other organisations.

### Issues and information arising from the research:

The information from these is given on the following pages. The sections are listed below with an indication of how information was gathered. These sections form the basis of the summary of findings and recommendations at the beginning of this report.

- A. Most important issues affecting voluntary sector work - *questionnaire, focus groups, telephone interviews*
- B. Databases, directories and information - *database development, questionnaire, local snapshot exercise*
- C. Thinking about good pieces of work - *focus groups*
- D. Strengthening the voluntary sector - *questionnaire, focus groups, telephone interviews*
- E. Training issues - *questionnaire, focus groups*
- F. Working together: partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors - *focus groups, telephone interviews*
- G. Preventing harm to children and young people - *questionnaire, focus groups*

## A. Most important issues affecting voluntary sector work

(positive and negative)

- Relationships with statutory agencies are improving and there is more openness to concept of partnership working
- Instability of funding and lack of core funding
- Context of constant change (and lack of time, money and human resources to support it properly) - no time for new initiatives and work to be evaluated
- Continuing tendency of funding programmes and bodies to want to pay for new work rather than existing, proven services
- Recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced staff
- Promoting services and promoting understanding of work (e.g. to recruit potential carers or raise awareness of needs of prisoners' families)
- Severe issues affecting our client group (e.g. parents of children with learning difficulties) - need to campaign as well as support
- Challenge of getting a voice and a chance for our knowledge to influence policy

## B. Databases, Directories and Information

- One important lesson learned from this research is that **human resources are especially important in information provision**. This has been borne out both in what participants have said and through the process of gathering the information.
- The nature of this area of work and of the organisations involved mean that directories, mailings, emails and so on are very poor substitutes for personal contact. Even good directories can never be totally comprehensive. Directories and databases are especially useful for statutory and voluntary sector staff and for volunteers who can pass the information on to individuals.
- It also became clear that levels of provision and levels of **local information and networking vary greatly** between different areas. It is easier to find out about services in areas that have regeneration or significant funding programmes (particularly Sure Start). This may be because of a higher level of provision and/or because there is more co-ordination of information provision and sharing of local knowledge.
- There are some very good sources of information available in Manchester. The Voluntary Action Manchester Directory is very thorough, regularly updated and easy to use. Nevertheless this research found several significant organisations who are not included in the VAM Directory.



- Sure Start Clayton sent a local directory including provision for older children and young people as well as for children in the Sure Start age group. This directory was proved to be up to date and effective when it was used as a tool for recruiting focus group participants in that area. In Cheetham parents had put local information onto a user-friendly, web-based directory. However many parts of the city currently have no such easily available sources of information.
- The local snapshot exercise carried out in Rusholme & Fallowfield showed how detailed phone conversations were successful in uncovering smaller organisations and illustrating the effectiveness of local networking. This exercise produced several contacts who would have been excluded if only paper directories had been used as sources of information. Perhaps as importantly the phone contacts produced a higher level of awareness of and participation in the research project than was achieved through mailings alone.
- Some smaller groups only operate at certain times of the week and may only have one part-time member of staff. Many more are very over-stretched in terms of human resources. In both cases this means that an investment of time and skill is needed to make and maintain contacts with these organisations and to keep information up to date.
- Many smaller groups have not yet been reached. The following are suggestions for additional significant sources of information to explore:
  - 1) The list of organisations applying to the Community Chest and the Community Learning Chest shows up many who are not in existing directories, including ones working with children and families.
  - 2) Churches and other religious organisations often provide support and activities for families and children. These may be particularly important in areas with relatively little other provision.
  - 3) Some supplementary schools are run by organisations included on the current list but there are other supplementary schools not yet included. There may also be groups and activities organised by and for families who educate their children at home.
  - 4) There are more groups than currently included which provide various kinds of support to families with disabled children or parents or for people with specific learning difficulties. These might include local, informal support groups. They also include many local branches of national charities, run by volunteers or part-time or freelance staff

### C. Thinking about good pieces of work

#### What was it?

- Girl with mother with epilepsy started going to school again, because school allowed her to phone home regularly.
- Parents from all over the city coming together to say what they wanted from parenting courses and influencing changes to the service.
- Driving theory and driving lessons for young people who were causing trouble driving cars round an estate
- Successful arts and crafts sessions for young people.
- Group work with 8 and 9 year olds to prevent involvement in crime.
- Setting up the first Community Creches.
- Well-organised, exciting and popular summer playschemes.
- Involving young people in the Mardi Gras festival.
- Families coming to and really enjoying a regular Family Group.
- Involving people in supported housing in 'Miles Platting in Bloom'.
- Support for birth parents whose children had been taken into care
- Making a video with elderly black people to show to young black people which helped them think about their own experience
- Courses to train volunteers to work as befrienders with families
- A project for children excluded from school which they want to come to.
- One-to-one work with young people to help them grow and develop
- Working with Adult Education to provide courses which parents enjoyed.

#### What made it work?

- The school were open to working with an outside body, listened to us and found a solution
- Vision, creativity, enthusiasm, commitment and motivation of staff to make things happen
- Addressing practical barriers (childcare and transport) so people were able to take part and felt valued
- Police and other agencies being prepared to put money in when they saw the value of the initial work.
- Having something concrete to offer young people
- Having direct evidence of value (i.e. no more problem driving around the estate)
- Taking time and effort to collect and present evidence
- Early Years and Play listening to local parents and being willing to try something new
- Trust in individual staff and in the organisation
- Having people to come in and work with us from other agencies - it made a change!
- Having the space available to run groups
- Having local knowledge and able to use local resources

#### What could make your work that good all the time?

- Statutory agencies **listening to users** and to voluntary sector workers - being flexible, responsive and **open to different ways of working**
- Voluntary sector valuing our own work and **ensuring have evidence** of its value and effect
- **Continuity of staffing and resources** to support relationships with users; stable funding; having money, space and facilities to do things
- **Having faith** in what we are doing; having the capacity to **continue to be creative, take risks, try new ideas** - this is what we are best at.

## D. Helping Ourselves - strengthening the voluntary sector

- Key positive factors mentioned by participants were the **commitment, creativity and experience** of staff and volunteers working in the voluntary sector.
- Being **'at the coal face'** and having the **capacity to be flexible and responsive** to users needs had given participants important experiences of **making a difference and seeing real change** in the lives of children, young people and parents.
- Therefore organisations need events that give opportunities to share positive experience and knowledge and which celebrate and strengthen the exciting and satisfying aspects of working in the sector.
- Organisations felt they could be better at **valuing and recording their work** so as to have **evidence** of what worked well and of the **benefits to the people they helped**.
- Therefore evaluation, communication and promotional skills would be useful for many organisations and groups.
- Most organisations contacted by researchers were enthusiastic about the concept of the research and willing to give time to phone interviews and focus groups. They were **interested in giving views** on issues and **welcome opportunities to share** with colleagues across sectors. Smaller organisations in particular would like more chances to talk to others.
- However, all organisations have huge pressures on human resources and can't afford much time for networking or responding to research.
- **Practical details such as venue, transport, childcare and food** are very important when organising events and meetings. Part-time staff and volunteers are often attending in their own time and therefore should be supported in practical ways and made to feel valuable.
- It is easier for smaller organisations to attend events organised locally. **However citywide networking works if it is supported in the practical ways mentioned above.** Small, community-based groups may have most to gain from seeing their work as part of a larger picture. Groups can often get new ideas from meeting others in similar communities in other parts of the city, or in other parts of the country.
- Larger, more specialist organisations are more likely to have established networks, often regional or national and involving others involved in similar work (e.g. on areas such as adoption or leaving care).

## E. Training Issues

- Organisations reported the need for a range of training specific to work with children and families. In most cases the need was for basic and necessary areas such as **First Aid** and **Child Protection**. First Aid in particular is expensive for small organisations.
- Several organisations raised the need for accessible NVQ training for staff and volunteers to meet new requirements for qualification levels.
- Short courses relating to youth work were also mentioned.
- Another specific request was for training in using interpreters, especially in counselling.
- More detail on the need for training on **child protection** issues follows in a later section (**Preventing harm to children & young people**).
- Organisations raised the need for support and training on organisational and administrative issues, such as management committee development, IT skills or fund-raising. This is not specific to organisations working with children and families but is an important indication of capacity issues in the sector.
- Training accessed by small to medium-sized organisations included that provided by EYD&CP, the Youth Service, Manchester Adult Education Service and other FE providers. Training provided for free by statutory sector is very much appreciated.
- Training from statutory providers is valued not only for its practical value but because it helps to develop relationships across sectors. For the same reason voluntary organisations sometimes value the opportunity to offer training in their areas of expertise to statutory workers.
- Some organisations needing training for sessional staff and volunteers said they still had problems organising staff cover and with training not being very local or at suitable times. Money for staff cover has been offered to organisations providing childcare, but has proved difficult to apply for and most organisations in any case have a shortage of suitably skilled staff who are available to provide cover.
- There are differences in needs between larger organisations with in-house training (e.g. branches of national charities such as Barnardo's or NCH) and smaller ones who have to seek out information.
- Lack of funds and lack of staff time are the two main reasons given for organisations not accessing more training.
- Organisations relying heavily on volunteers raised the need for accessible and appropriate training for volunteers.

## F. Working Together: partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors

### What does the voluntary sector contribute?

- ~ Voluntary sector '**plugs the gaps**'. Statutory sector good at universal services and emergency/crisis level. We are good at earlier intervention.
- ~ The ability to be **flexible, innovative** and to listen and to try something new Don't have to stick to rigid models. Can have **vision and new ideas**.
- ~ We have **clarity of motivation** - set things up because people want / need them.
- ~ **Being 'at the coal face'**. We're where it's at. Some statutory agencies are, but we are always where we are needed.
- ~ **Local knowledge**. Identifying local issues, tailoring things to local needs. We involve local people.
- ~ The work we do is **capacity building**. People get opportunities to volunteer, to give to other people and to take something back into their communities.
- ~ **We really are confidential**. We don't share information in the same ways as statutory sector agencies do, which makes us seem more secure
- ~ We are **not the statutory sector, not compulsory**, so are more approachable.
- ~ **Outward looking and knowledgeable** about the rest of the voluntary sector.
- ~ **Normally less bureaucratic**. If you have a good idea you can ask another voluntary sector organisation and get it implemented.
- ~ We can offer **something different** that nobody else is offering
- ~ **Better value for money**.
- ~ **We know our limits** and are willing to work with others for benefit of users.
- ~ **Inclusive**. We work with all groups not just popular ones.
- ~ **Expertise in specific areas** and transferable skills.

### What does the statutory sector contribute?

- ~ Provide **funding**, or have access to funding; more **flexibility** in how use funds?
- ~ **Numbers**: they come into contact with very large numbers of people who need other services, those who need most support.
- ~ **Professional experience** - long term, detailed knowledge and expertise.
- ~ Access to **resources**: buildings, staff, administration, catering, transport
- ~ Clear authority / **power** / clout, ability to **make decisions** about services
- ~ Meeting needed **statutory requirements** e.g. Child Protection, policing etc.
- ~ They provide **basic universal services, entry and emergency level**.
- ~ **Big and permanent** therefore more secure.
- ~ **Gathering information** and disseminating it within their organisation.
- ~ **Lead agency / key role in multi agency work**.

## F. Working Together contd.

### Potential benefits of working with others?

- ~ **Maximises resources** to provide more useful support to families.
- ~ **Sharing everything**, information, resources, skills, experience.
- ~ The statutory sector **supports the voluntary sector to become more accountable** and business like.
- ~ **If we work well together then all gaps will be plugged.**
- ~ It would take account of the whole picture, so services are not provided in isolation. **Holistic working** would increase access to services for families.
- ~ **Can learn and improve together.**
- ~ **Unexpected, spin-off benefits**, statutory services can bring in other services.
- ~ **Increases the services available** to people because statutory and voluntary sector agencies know their own sector best.

### What makes partnerships work well?

- ~ **Clarity of roles and responsibilities.**
- ~ All parties having **agreed aims.**
- ~ **Good communication** (passing on of information to others)
- ~ **Secure funding.**
- ~ **Flexibility** - being receptive to new or different ways of working.
- ~ Enthusiasm / dynamism / commitment.
- ~ Listening to users, being needs led; Consultation; Regular evaluation & reviews.
- ~ Trust, respect and **personal contact** between individual workers.
- ~ Impressions of e.g. Sure Start as promoting networking.
- ~ Also good experiences of working with Adult Education and Early Years Partnership.
- ~ Training from the statutory sector is useful e.g. Youth Service and Early Years & Play.
- ~ **Valuing other peoples'** complementary skills and experience.
- ~ Celebrating and building on success

## F. Working Together contd.

### What are the barriers to effective partnership working?

- ~ **Poor communication.**
- ~ Roles and expectations not being clear.
- ~ Unrealistic targets
- ~ Prescriptive working and rigidity. e.g. inappropriate timing for meetings or events because of normal working hours
- ~ Clashes of culture: fear of leaving the comfort zone, and doing something new.
- ~ **Unequal partnership** (e.g. when a statutory body brings you in to talk to them, gathers information from you and leaves you thinking 'what did I get from that?')
- ~ The voluntary sector (small and large scale) is often forgotten, e.g. not listed as a potential partner re: Children's Centres.
- ~ **Insecure funding / Short term funding**, no time to invest in multi-agency work, just interested in getting the service out.
- ~ Lack of motivation and direction. Doesn't work if people only doing the work because their boss has told them to and they are not really committed - nor if workers are keen but don't get support and resources from above.
- ~ Feeling of it being 'them and us.' **Lack of respect, lack of knowledge.**
- ~ Poor consultation or evaluation. Changes and reorganisations without consultation. Structures and strategies keep changing.
- ~ **Lack of continuity of staffing in public sector.** Can quickly lose contacts which an organisation has built up over time.
- ~ Lack of cooperation and shared vision.
- ~ Lack of understanding of issues by those with power and money.
- ~ **Competitiveness and suspicion**, e.g. agencies not sharing information for fear of diluting their own value.
- ~ Delays because you have to wait for other people to make decisions.
- ~ Service boundaries - both sectors are often too postcode specific.
- ~ Statutory sector has very limited models for partnership working. Voluntary sector more used to having to work hard at building relationships with communities, individuals and organisations - this experience could be valued and used.
- ~ Rigidity and lack of confidence in relation to sharing information / confidentiality issues.

## F. Working Together contd.

### What could make it work better

#### (i.e. remove barriers)?

- ~ Improving **communication**.
- ~ **Taking relationships** seriously - try to ensure continuity of staffing, or handing over established relationships to replacement staff. Valuing relationships built up between agencies/sectors.
- ~ **Better knowledge** between both sectors of one another's work.
- ~ Training and qualifications - **more cross-sector training**.
  
- ~ Agreement between agencies and individual workers about **aims, roles, responsibilities**.
- ~ **Equality** between organisations.
- ~ **Equal commitment** from all partners.
- ~ **Realistic targets**.
- ~ Less bureaucracy.
- ~ **Greater flexibility**, being prepared to do something new.
- ~ Need a balance of accountability - enabling / limiting
  
- ~ **Sustainability**.
- ~ **Clear longer term funding and strategies**, giving organisations **time to invest in relationships**
- ~ **More awareness** of impact of statutory sector changes.
- ~ **Consultation before** decisions are made.
- ~ Anticipation of knock on effects, a **more holistic, joined up approach**.
  
- ~ Recognition of the **value of voluntary agencies**.
- ~ Support for capacity building in the voluntary sector.
- ~ Emphasis on **bottom up approach**.
- ~ Have interest in and value service users input



## G. Preventing Harm to Children & Young People

### **How and why is the voluntary sector important in preventative work?**

- Voluntary sector organisations have a key role to play in preventative work because they are trusted by users and communities. The sector includes grass roots organisations developed in response to local needs, run by local people and enjoying high levels trust from and knowledge of disadvantaged and sometimes isolated communities.
- The nature of sector enables it to be flexible and highly responsive, to take risks, develop new ideas and be at the cutting edge of innovative and good practice. It is often in the voluntary sector that successful services are developed for unpopular or hard to reach groups of people, with severe or multiple problems.
- Organisations providing local childcare and play services are often well used by families who have problems or are at risk of developing problems. They are likely to be seen as supportive to parents and as non-judgemental. They are assumed to have different responsibilities from statutory workers (such as teachers or health visitors) in terms of passing information to other bodies and are therefore more trusted.
- Workers in these organisations may often come from the same community as those people using the services.

### **What are the pros and cons of this position? What are problems for voluntary sector organisations in this area of work?**

- Parents or children having problems may be more likely to confide in local, voluntary sector workers and therefore it presents opportunities to offer help before a crisis is reached.
- Workers can lack confidence in making referrals to other agencies - both because they fear damaging relationships with the community and because they may themselves have low levels of trust and knowledge of agencies such as social services.
- The lack of help available from statutory agencies at a pre-crisis level may also mean that organisations have bad experiences of trying to make referrals or get help for a family.
- Child protection training available to organisations is valued but doesn't go far enough and doesn't always take account of how voluntary organisations work

▪ More responsibilities are being placed on voluntary sector providers of services to children (e.g. in terms of recording information and training and qualifications for workers), but no extra resources are made available and less informal advice and support is available than in the past [specific examples here - (i) loss of Early Years Advisors when Ofsted took over inspections and (ii) staff cover offered to enable workers to attend training, but in practice money never forthcoming and doesn't take account of shortages of suitable cover staff.]. So initiatives which should improve services to children in fact become burdens which threaten organisations' capacity to do their work.

**What could make the situation better - i.e. what could improve joint working between statutory sector and voluntary sector agencies so that children and young people at risk get the help they need?**

- New initiatives must take account of the realities of the voluntary sector, how it is different from the statutory sector and the constraints on the capacity of smaller organisations. New responsibilities should not be imposed without the resources to make them possible.
- Better communication and clearer referral routes between statutory and voluntary sector workers. This includes much better information for voluntary sector organisations of what different agencies do, what services are available, who is responsible, how to access services, who to talk to for informal advice etc. etc.
- Recognition by the statutory sector of the important actual and potential role of voluntary sector organisations in preventative work - including them in the overall picture.
- Building on voluntary sector regard for training provided through the statutory sector and develop appropriate, flexible and sophisticated training and advice to support preventative work with families and communities. This would include: - **'child-centred guidance on child protection'** and also training in more specialist areas such as **mental health issues** and **managing challenging behaviour** in children. It is hard for smaller organisations to get training on these areas.
- Opportunities should be created for sharing training between the voluntary and statutory sectors - to promote common understanding and good practice and to build practical, working relationships.