

WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP WORKING?

A lot has been written about the theory of partnership working. However, translating theory into practice is **not always easy**. Partnerships can be formed between a number of individuals, agencies or organisations with a shared interest. There is usually an overarching purpose for partners to work together and a range of specific objectives. Partnerships are often formed to address specific issues and may be short or long term.

In order to achieve a co-ordinated service partners need to:

- **Communicate**
- **Co-ordinate**
- **Co-operate**

What are the benefits of partnership working?

There is emerging evidence about the benefits for both service users and service providers of working in partnership with other services. A partnership approach founded on co-operation and collaboration between all relevant providers will have a number of **benefits for service users**. These include:

- removal of barriers to progressing towards stabilisation / rehabilitation
- providing more consistent, co-ordinated and comprehensive care
- access to a range of training, education and employment opportunities

The **benefits for service providers** of partnership working include the ability to:

- develop a 'whole person' approach
- manage a broader range of services which address the individual's needs
- develop a better understanding of others' skills and develop a wider range of personal skills in dealing with clients
- develop a wider skill base for staff to meet more effectively the needs of individuals
- recognise and utilise the strengths and areas of expertise of all the partner agencies involved
- make the best use of available resources by managing care of more people in a co-ordinated and cost-effective way - including pooling resources

Key principles and ingredients of a successful partnership

There are a number of **key principles** of partnership working. These are:

- openness, trust and honesty between partners
- agreed shared goals and values
- regular communication between partners

There has been a lot of research undertaken to identify what makes a good partnership and what the barriers are to achieving effective partnership working. Some key documents are listed in the further resources section. Partnerships can work in different ways and there is no one model that can be considered to be the 'best'. There are, however, **a number of ingredients** which - if they are present - will facilitate successful partnership working:

- the aim of the partnership is agreed and understood by all the partners
- the partnership has clear, effective leadership
- the role of each partner is identified and clear to others in the partnership
- there is shared ownership of the partnership and the partners feel there is 'something in it for them'
- there are dedicated time and resources for the administration and operation of the partnership
- there is recognition of different organisational cultures within the partnership
- a supportive atmosphere exists within the partnership where suggestions, ideas and conflicts are addressed

The choice of partners is important. Partnerships are often formed from existing networks or where there is a history of collaborative work between potential partners. However, there are circumstances where it is important to invite **new partners** to the table.

Strategic partnerships should identify:

- the aims and objective of the partnership
- the range of agencies that could be engaged
- the commissioning and management arrangements
- arrangements for sharing information
- arrangements for multi-agency training to promote mutual understanding
- monitoring and evaluation arrangements for both the partnership and the service

Operational partnerships will commonly focus on more practical aspects and should identify:

- the aims and objective of the partnership
- common procedures
- protocols and systems for sharing information
- joint training opportunities
- arrangements for monitoring and evaluation

Barriers to effective partnership working

There are some potential difficulties for partners. Misunderstanding of the reasons for the partnership and a lack of commitment to the partnership can cause barriers. Other recognised barriers are:

- no clear boundary between partners' responsibilities
- reluctance to share information and data with other partners
- lack of time available to commit to the partnership, particularly in the early stages
- misconceptions or previous negative experiences of partnership working
- potential conflicts in philosophies of the partners
- lack of training among partners on substantive issues and partnership working

Why do we need to work in this partnership?

- What will the partnership deliver that we could not deliver on our own?
- Is it clear what our role is in the partnership?
- Do we know what the life expectancy is of the partnership?
- Are the aims and objectives of the partnership clear?

Key Steps

- 1. Identify aims and objectives**
- 2. Clarify roles and remits**
- 3. Ensure partners are committed, willing and supported**
- 4. Ensure partnership has resources**
- 5. Establish structure and processes**
- 6. Get working!**
- 7. Review and evaluate**

Community planning and partnerships

Community planning is where a number of local organisations (from councils to voluntary groups) work together to improve the quality of life for local people.

It gives local people the opportunity to shape local services and the places where they live, work and spend their leisure time.

It helps communities to become safer, stronger, healthier, wealthier and more sustainable in the future.

Local Strategic Partnerships

A Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) brings together key agencies and organisations to identify long term priorities to sustain and improve an area. Through community planning the LSP develops a sustainable community strategy where, by working together, partners can make a big difference.

LSPs are made up of many organisations including:

- local councils
- the police, fire service, and health organisations
- local businesses
- the voluntary and community sector

Leaders and senior officers will usually represent each of these organisations to ensure that decisions are made and that the money and resources needed for action are available.