



Making it clear

A community network model of brokerage: Evaluation of the independent brokerage pilot in East Ayrshire

Summary Report

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Outcomes achieved

Community Brokerage Network has achieved all of its outcomes, exceeded some, and achieved additional impact, notably speeding up the support process for people, and the accelerated implementation of Self-Directed Support locally.

Its five outcomes are summarised below:

1. Improved access to support and information about SDS for more people

64 people have used brokerage support, exceeding a three-year target of 45 people. CBN is skilled at making complex information accessible and understandable.

2. Increased opportunities for genuine choice and control for people

This outcome was exceeded, as a number of additional impacts were identified, including improved aspiration and life chances; personal growth; greater independence; and increased connectedness. Carers commonly reported reduced stress as a result of CBN support.

3. Improved joint, transparent and collaborative working for SDS

CBN developed a genuinely collaborative approach to working with communities, local authority staff, brokers, partner organisations and other stakeholders. More progress can still be made to develop understanding of the brokerage model.

4. Improved coproduction

This outcome was largely evidenced, but gaps remain, particularly about the ways in which people can be involved in developing the Network. There are indications of a desire among carers for the Network to facilitate opportunities for peer sharing and support.

5. Increase the knowledge and understanding in relation to support brokerage

This outcome is most evident for those who have been involved in the Network. The next challenge is to widen that understanding, though important questions still remain about how best to describe brokerage.

Learning about processes

Broker recruitment, support and development

This is where the Network's community development aims become most manifest. It has taken longer than expected to develop an effective network of brokers, which has had an impact on Directors' ability to develop the organisation. To date the model has necessarily been relatively developmental and supportive for brokers. However as the Network grows, a slightly more detached model can develop, more akin to the widespread consultancy model of using associates.

Broker role

The most common aspect of the broker's role to be appreciated by stakeholders is their ability to find out about appropriate services and supports. Carers appreciated having someone to take this burden from them, and value brokers' tenacity and a number of other qualities which include:

- *Ability to tailor support* – Brokers 'bend over backwards' to get the right support for people
- *Good listening skills* – Brokers listen respectfully and take people's views fully on board
- *Passion for doing the job well* – Brokers' enthusiasm stands out, even when people are happy with other services
- *Reliability* – Carers fully trust Broker's to do what they say they are going to do. And to do it on time.
- *Plain speaking* – Brokers make it easier to understand complex information.

Challenges and learning

CBN is deliberately engaged in the process of learning and improvement and has an accurate appraisal of past, present and future challenges. The following themes emerged in the evaluation:

Partnership

CBN's model worked well by being 'hosted' by a Local Authority, adding value as part of the change process for Self-Directed Support and Personalisation. The partnership between CBN and East Ayrshire Council has been fundamental to the pilot's operation and success. It is the spirit in which the two organisations are prepared to learn together that most characterises the relationship.

Independence

This is one of the most deeply held values for the Network, with many layers to it. CBN appears to equate independence with impartiality. This assumption needs to be tested as the longer-term sustainability of the organisation is explored.

Boundaries

CBN is still developing its ability to describe how it is distinct from – and adds value to - roles like social work and independent advocacy. However there is evidence that Community Brokerage Network is proactive at anticipating and managing potential role confusion, and at engaging partner agencies in debate about the role of the independent broker.

Sustainability for the local network

Most of the elements we would expect to see in a sustainable network are in place in the Community Brokerage Network in East Ayrshire, including good relationships with local and national partners. However the number of trained and experienced brokers, and the number of organisations fully embracing self-directed support still need to be development.

As Brokers' knowledge and experience grow, there will be less reliance on the Directors' to provide and manage brokerage. This allows more time to be put into maintaining the local Network. In theory, once Brokers are more equipped to deal with complex enquiries, the Network could be self-sustaining as long as an appropriate way to take – and allocate – referrals was found.

Sustainability for the organisation

There are mixed views among stakeholders about how to fund the local Network in future. The evaluation assessed a number of potential funding routes based on their *acceptability, independence, sustainability* and *feasibility*. Grant-making trusts and Local Authority funding of one kind or another are the likeliest routes for appropriate, sustainable funding for Community Brokerage Network.

CBN's structure could also contain an answer to the question of independence from funding, effectively acting as a buffer between funding and a network of independent self-employed brokers. CBN could be a 'broker of brokerage', ensuring that the people who provide brokerage remain totally independent of local authority influence while also ensuring quality and standards are maintained.

Recommendations

1. Explaining brokerage

To individuals and families

1.1 When concluding a period of support, Brokers should give clear information about if and how people can get back in touch if they need to.

1.2 Likewise, if it is the intention to continue involving people in the co-production of the brokerage model, this should be made more explicit as part of everyday work.

To the wider world

1.3 The website's case study section should be expanded to give more examples of the processes and outcomes of brokerage. Examples beyond people immediately involved in CBN (i.e. brokers and staff) would be particularly valuable.

To professionals and support organisations

1.4 Develop clearer guidelines on the boundaries of brokerage, i.e. what brokers can, and cannot, provide. Demarcating the lines between brokerage and advocacy, and brokerage and social work is particularly important for getting stakeholder understanding and support.

1.5 Consider encouraging care providers' engagement with brokerage on the basis that Brokers have a unique perspective on the level of demand – and unmet need – locally. Of course, CBN cannot compromise its independence by making any guarantees of referrals, but it can play a role in encouraging increased flexibility by helping providers understand the collective purchasing power of the people it supports.

To national debates about brokerage

1.6 CBN should continue to engage with and influence national debates around brokerage, particularly regarding the accreditation of brokers, as this helps ensure the standards and values that matter to CBN are accepted and embedded.

To potential partners and funders

1.7 CBN needs to be able to describe not just the features and processes involved in support brokerage, but the benefits too – including, for the host organisation, transformative system change.

1.8 When applying to funders, there can be merit in describing not just the impact of brokerage on people who receive support, but also on brokers. Some funders (for example, Big Lottery, the Health and Social Care Alliance, Voluntary Action Fund) actively support capacity building or peer support models of this kind.

2. Supporting the network

2.1 Shadowing should continue to be a central element of support to, and quality assurance of, brokers even when they are well-established.

2.2. Brokers providing mentoring should have enough information about new recruits to help them plan their support accordingly.

2.3 Peer support should continue to be encouraged, to strengthen the network and reduce reliance on CBN Directors.

2.3 Reviewing whether skills should be included in the Broker Competency Framework, alongside knowledge and values.

2.4 Look into the desire among carers for the Network to facilitate more group opportunities for peer sharing and support. This could be an appropriate way to develop co-production and collaboration in mutually beneficial ways.

3. Developing the organisation

3.1 Directors should remain as open as possible to the continued testing of some of the organisation's core values and assumptions.

3.2 This includes acknowledging that Scottish Government funding is not sustainable in the longer term and that other funding sources should be considered

3.3 A structure that allows CBN to act as a buffer between funding and independent self-employed Brokers could support a more sustainable blend of charitable grants and public sector funding.