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A partnership approach; supporting and empowering vulnerable women within one UK city

Louise Warwick-Booth, and Susan Coan
Centre for Health Promotion Research

What are we talking about?

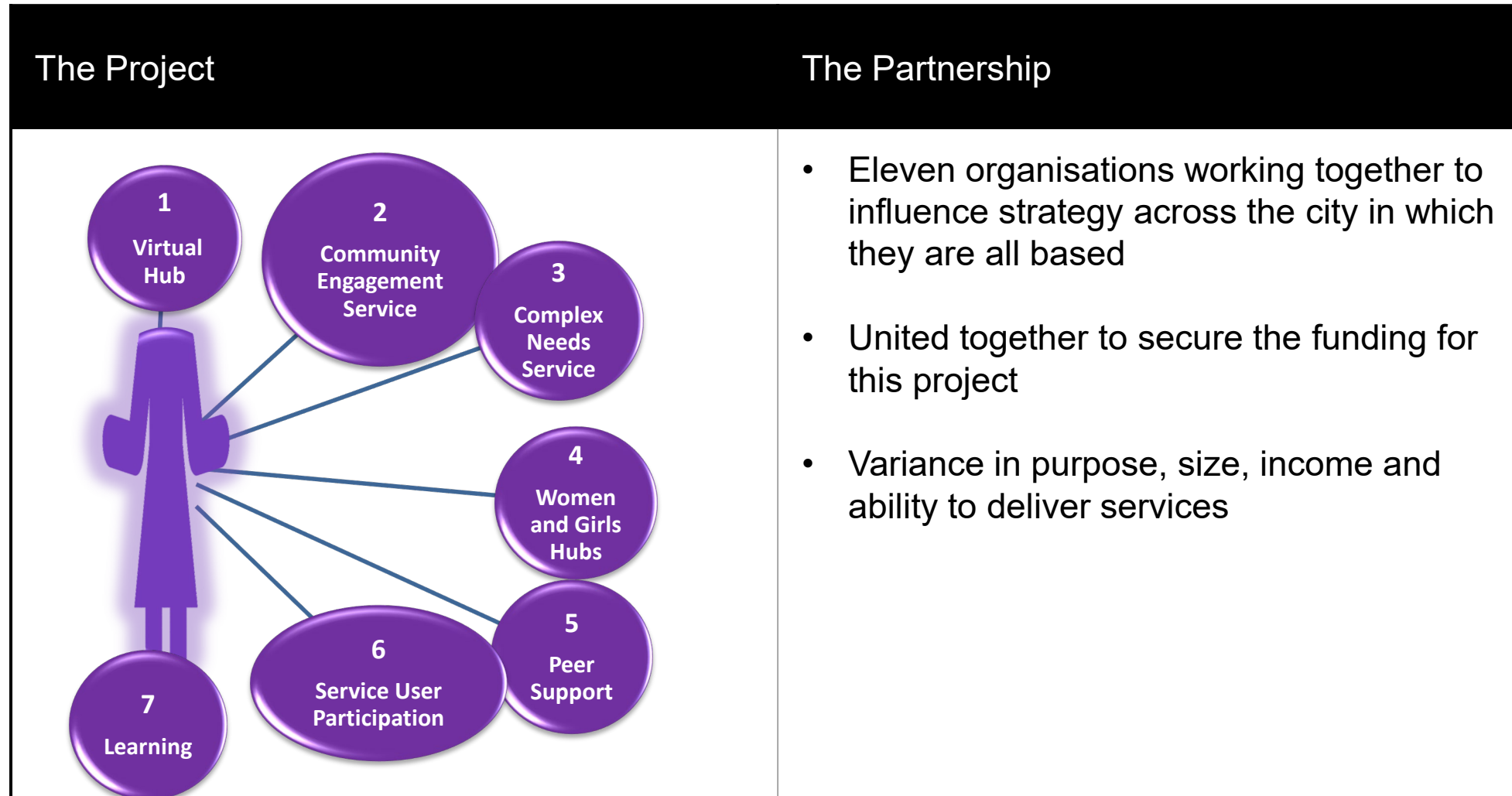
We are discussing a voluntary sector strategic partnership and delivery project involving eleven women-centred organisations who worked together to support the most vulnerable women and girls across a city in the north of England 2017-2021.

Both the project and the partnership intended to:

1. Improved and extended access for vulnerable women and girls in one city, to the services and support they want, when they choose (identified groups: young women, women with complex needs, recently arrived)
2. A holistic response to ensure that the needs of women and girls with multiple and complex issues are better supported
3. Women and Girls will be empowered to support their peers and influence service delivery, development and design across the city

This presentation details our evaluation findings and outlines key lessons from service delivery, within a wider partnership model. We found a successful model of support (service) working to support women and girls holistically, despite the partnership itself being problematic.

The project and the partnership





Our evaluation

- A three-year longitudinal qualitative evaluation, from the start of delivery underpinned by a feminist methodology.
- Theory of Change approach to assess the extent to which the project and partnerships aims had been met.
- Our sample included 34 service users and 54 professionals (19 of which were repeat interviews) with data gathered between 2017-2020.
- We also conducted a service review after 1 year of project delivery, using focus groups to explore staff learning as well as challenges.

Outcome 1 – improved and extended support

- Online service directory used for mental health and domestic abuse searches (mostly)
- Community Engagement Service – lots of information provision but high staff turnover:
 - Workshops 4326
 - Community groups 1831
 - Drop-in sessions 186

“I feel like especially women from ethnic minority communities, they don’t necessarily access mainstream services in the way that other people might. And it’s important to have community-based organisations such as this, where they feel comfortable and where they’re able to access support.” Community Engagement Worker

Outcome 2 – holistic support

- Complex Needs Service = success. 'Glued' together the partnership
- 207 women supported
- Lots of unmet and complex need – 39% had more than 5 needs at referral
- Positive outcomes for women via long term support
- Empowerment via holistic support
- Specialist workers e.g. young women, sex worker support, post-removal role



"I truly believe that she [Complex Needs Worker] has saved me, not just from myself but from life. She has given me a glimmer of hope that life is worth living if I choose to do so." Service User

"No one women and girls' organisation has all of the specialisms and knows everything. There is more skill together than separate." CEO

Outcome 3 – empowerment to influence

- Hubs (meetings) focused on gender-specific issues and networking. Discussions lead to application for more £££ (successful) 12 meetings, 1500 women took part
- 12 Peer supporters trained, 4 embedded in partner organisations
- Service user participation – activities; 58 on advisory board, 2229 contributed to learning

“It’s been a big major part of my recovery in all avenues from domestic violence and drink as well and boundaries and have better relationship with the key people in my life like my kids and my family.” Service User on peer support role

“I was looking at something that I could use my brain, not just look after children, not just do cleaning and ironing, not just being a mum, not just be a victim of domestic violence, and that’s what I was looking for. You know I wanted to broaden out and just try different things.” Advisory Board member

Partnership data

Challenges in the partnership	Facilitators of the partnership	Benefits of the partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of full attendance at meetings delaying decision making • Greater time and resource pressures for smaller partners • Competing priorities (remaining focused on the priorities of their own organisation, such as securing their own funding for the future, alongside meeting the demands of the partnership) • Maximising the best use of partner time • Challenging dynamics (conflict and disagreement) because of differences in partner approaches and personalities • Difficulty separating project and partnership at the outset, with priority given to service delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project delivery was 'the glue...and that's a fact' • Effective leadership from the Core Team • Appointment of a Strategic Development Worker in 2019, focusing upon longer term strategy • Appointment of an Independent Chair to manage partnership meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting a Complex Needs Worker (skills development and the creation of additional capacity) • Supporting funding bids by evidencing partnership working and avoiding service duplication • Increased sustainability for partners • Wider systems change



Partnership

"...when you're a very small organisation, you're just doing your day-to-day run of the mill kind of your job. You don't really know what's going on in the wider picture of things." CEO

"...not all voices being heard"
CEO

"The peer support has been good. It's good to be able to call someone else up to talk something over as this is an isolating field to work in. It's good to get advice or copies of policies from others that we can use." CEO

"The point of the consortium is to be more powerful together, to have more connections and to share the specialisms." CEO



Final reflections

- Evaluation evidence shows that the aims of the project and partnership were met - our evidence shows that this project and partnership was a successful gendered intervention that had positive empowering impacts on many of those involved
- Project (service delivery) served as a glue to keep partners invested despite the challenges of working together
- Our data uncovered the hidden dichotomy between external success, such as achieving the delivery outcomes, and internal partnership politics, which are underexplored
- Funders asked for partnership applications but these organisations whilst working together are still competing for funding



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Thank you

Any questions?