

ACCESS: Cottonera Community Resource Centre

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The European Social Network

ESN is the independent network for local and regional social services whose members may also manage health, education, employment and youth services. ESN is a forum for policy and practice exchange and development and for the representation of local and regional social services in Europe. ESN supports the coordination and integration of local services and promotes good practice among its members.

1. Integrated/Coordinated Local Services in Europe

The ACCESS model can be seen as part of a broader movement to coordinate or integrate local public services across various areas: social with employment services (Netherlands, Norway), social with health services (Italy), social services with education (UK).

There are various motivations including financial: integrated services may reduce overhead costs and lead to efficiency savings; better joint working between employment services and benefits agencies may in the longer term reduce benefits expenditure.

However the primary consideration should be the needs of the community and of the individual facing marginalisation. Multiple problems mean that many people have difficulty finding appropriate solutions. Therefore they need help from a range of services which are capable of working together and in parallel to help people to regain control over their own lives.

The challenges of coordinating or integrating local services both within the public sector and across private and voluntary providers are familiar and there is a great deal of experience to draw on. Obstacles to integrated services at operational level typically include: differing values and priorities of providers, differing assessment models, different management structures and competing financial structures and incentives. Change is difficult to achieve, it can involve short-term investment (though savings may occur in the long-term), requires national political and strong local managerial leadership and will take time.

2. Coordinated local services: ESN members' experiences

We would like to present the comments of ESN members with experience and expertise in developing managing integrated services across a range of areas.

Managerial Issues: Making a Success of Integrated Services

- Working together under one roof should naturally and informally help organisations and service professionals to understand one another, but it does not guarantee that services will work together effectively and efficiently to help people with multiple problems.
- Experience from other countries reveals positive (e.g. financial reward for positive results achieved by cooperation) and negative (administrative complexities of cooperation) incentives to work together.
- In an integrated project, the different providers need to feel they have 'ownership' of the project and share the same objectives and values.

Service User Participation:

- There are various levels of service user involvement:
 - (i) at governance/structural via a service users' panel or community group: this would also support community development though training needs to be provided to the community representatives for constructive engagement
 - (ii) at a personal level, in terms of an open discussion between professionals and clients on needs and services.
 Both are vital and, as ACCESS wishes to have a particular family function, the participation of children needs to be considered as a specific group.
- Informal feedback from ACCESS users is reported as good on specific services but the participation of service users in the design and delivery of services generally appears to be an area for development.

Assessment and Inspection

- "ACCESS still lacks a comprehensive set of data to thoroughly evaluate the service delivery of the various entities" [Peer Review Discussion Paper]
- There also appears to be little formal evaluation of the quality of individual services or accompanying inspection – this would be regarded as vital in a UK/Nordic context.
- While the aspiration expressed in the ACCESS vision statement to which all partners signed up is positive, it may be useful to assess to what extent the common vision has been translated into reality. This would help bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the model and help to identify areas for development.

Community Development

- Aspiration to strengthen the community is positive but specific services/grants can be made available to support this.
- Many communities have good experience of engaging volunteers to lead community initiatives and engage in daily care tasks for dependent people.
- Experience from France shows that a community group or users' panel needs financial support, training on government structures, public policy and processes and public speaking and communication in order to engage effectively with decision-makers locally and beyond.

3. Partnerships and Joint Working – experience of other countries, ideas for ACCESS?

- Health Services: in the area of adult social care and particularly long-term care for older people, ESN members felt it vital to work closely with health professionals. Other countries have set up formal working partnerships or co-location models particularly with primary health care (community nurses, general practitioners).
- Economic sector and social enterprises: in terms of community development and regeneration, examples from other countries' (Netherlands) employment/social services work with economic development agencies to attract investment and jobs into the area and ensure that marginalised people benefit from the investment.
- Schools: local authorities in England & Wales have merged children's social care and education departments into children's services. Brighton & Hove City Council have created and Children and Young People's Trust which involves also the health service, police and other community partners.
- Police: Denmark has a well-known and well-regarded model for working with young people which involves cooperation between social services, schools and the police (SSP).

ACCESS: Future Ways of Working?

ACCESS is presently a co-location of services which work together on specific projects. The key question is how the authorities want the ACCESS project to develop further. Here it would be helpful to think about what communities are likely to need in 5-10 years and what services and what types of joint working would be needed to respond to this.

Consultation with the in-house service providers, local community and service users would be vital. One potential direction could be to develop single integrated assessments (for more people with the most complex needs) of the client and for the client to have a case worker (the fewer people the client sees, the easier services are to access).

Given the planned establishment of other similar centres in Malta, there is an opportunity to continue innovating at the different centres. The different centres and service managers could also be encouraged and supported to establish and maintain contact with each other as a mechanism for professional support. They would then be able to exchange good practice, learning from projects, discuss shared challenges and potential solutions across the island(s).

National Strategies SP & SI

Within the context of the National Strategies, examples of good practice in integrating social, health, education, employment, housing and other services could be highlighted. In the framework of the SPC's focused work on child poverty and exclusion this year, integrated family/children's services could be a particular issue for light reports and the SPC internal peer review.

Post-seminar postscript

This was a most interesting peer review seminar and it was good to look at a model of local social services which has clearly united different services around a common vision, has facilitated joint project working and allowed better provision of services to people in need in Cottonera. Its strong community focus was a particular strength and one which ESN intends to look at and work on with members in future, especially through the European Social Services Conference 2008 (Paris, 2-4 July) where community development and empowerment will be a leading theme.

It is important to reiterate that ACCESS is part of a trend for local services from different sectors to work together. There is a great deal of experience in developing service partnerships across Europe and strong potential for mutual learning. It is important to continue to give opportunities to governments and service providers to learn from one another's experience.