



Ruthless Research

Final report:

Evaluation of the CHANGE project: Interviews with key stakeholders

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About Ruthless Research

Ruthless Research is an Edinburgh-based independent research consultancy, through which Ruth Stevenson provides a range of qualitative and quantitative research solutions to organisations who work for the benefit of the community.

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Background and context

Background

The CHANGE project involved the creation of an innovative, co-produced childcare model in Calton/Bridgeton, Parkhead/Dalmarnock and Tollcross/West Shettleston in Glasgow, in order to enhance: utilisation of childcare amongst 0 to 12 year olds who engage with the project, family wellbeing, perceptions of neighbourhood-based services, and access to social, recreational and economic opportunities for those families who engage with the project.

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health evaluated the initial phase of the project which came to an end in September 2019, however an additional year of funding was awarded to secure the legacy of the project locally.

Children in Scotland commissioned independent researcher Ruth Stevenson to undertake a series of depth interviews with key project stakeholders, to contribute to the final project evaluation.

Methodology

Semi-structured telephone depth interviews were undertaken with six key project stakeholders during October 2020. These included representatives of local education and childcare partners, and other partner organisations.

The findings are summarised in the following report, and verbatim quotes from the project stakeholders that were interviewed are included in the report to illustrate the findings.

Summary of key findings

Impact on provision of local childcare

Research Question 1: What impact does CHANGE have on the number of high-quality childcare services for children (up to 12 years) within the project area?

Understanding local childcare needs

The childcare aspect of it is huge for families in this area. I think we've got really strong evidence what they need.

The CHANGE project focused on identifying local childcare needs by working with the community. It worked closely with local families “to contact parents and capture their views” in an inclusive and meaningful way, in order to uncover “what people’s needs are and how to address them” in relation to childcare. The CHANGE project also worked with a variety of local partners and service providers to “discuss all the aspects of childcare and what was needed in the local community” and to make plans to address the issues arising. The Family Champions also played a major role in understanding local need. Originally it was hoped that 12 Community Activists would be recruited, but “the local people didn’t like the connotations” of the name and “there was no chance we’d get 12 as that would require a support worker” so plans evolved as the project went on. Family Champions were recruited “based on local relationships” and “trust” and “they all had issues around access to childcare but they didn’t want other people to experience that”. The Family Champions proved to be a vital link to the community in person and via social media.

Issues identified

There was issues for families that had to attend court or a counselling session or the Health Visitor or GP and had to take the child along. The parent isn't getting the best of the session, and it is distressing for the child.

The CHANGE project identified a number of local issues around childcare, including:

- Limited childcare spaces as the (Local Authority) “nurseries were full”
- Limited childcare availability for age 0-2
- Limited emergency childcare provision
- Limited after school care provision
- Challenges for single parents, and families new to the area or from different cultures
- Challenges relating to the expansion of childcare hours entitlement
- Practicalities relating to matching childcare around varied or non 9-5 working hours
- Employability aspect of families being unable to work due to childcare needs

During the course of the project, some stakeholders felt that provision of after school care and emergency provision and childminding “has increased which is really good”.

Impact on provision of local childminding

Research Question 2: How has CHANGE contributed to number of and awareness of childminding within the CHANGE area?

Local provision of childminders

They found there were no childminders in the area which was strange, it was a deficit that had somehow never been formally identified.

It was noted that childminders would be particularly well placed to meet some of the identified local childcare needs around provision for children aged 0-2, emergency childcare, and the expansion of childcare hours entitlement. However, the CHANGE project also identified that “the area only has three childminders and they are all in Shettleston”.

Understanding the value of childminders

People didn't even know what a childminder was let alone if they needed one.

The CHANGE project identified a number of issues around awareness in relation to childminders. For example, “some had never heard of a childminder” and “some thought a childminder cost lots of money” and others had concerns around “going into someone’s home” in an area with a history of crime (followed by subsequent regeneration), worrying “they might be alright but who else is in that tenement?”. Related to this, it was noted that people may not realise that childminding is regulated. It was thus uncovered that there are “gaps around the promotion of childminders” and crucially that “there has to be work to make people aware that childminding is a service they can use in the local community” because “we might recruit childminders but they wouldn’t get business if people were suspicious or didn’t know what it was all about”. Actions have subsequently involved “working on joint materials to explain what childminding was” and “recruiting some childminders” and it was felt that by the close of the project “we have made an inroad”. One national partner noted that “we might not have been as aware that a lot more support and resource needs to go into a deprived area” without the CHANGE project.

Childminding as a route to employability

Childminding in itself can be a source of income for a mother who cannot go back to work, she can be supported to set up a childminding business.

It was noted that childminding could be a career and source of income for local parents. The CHANGE project helped to establish a partnership childminding project that worked towards supporting individuals to take childcare qualifications as well as providing advice around “liability”, “getting the house ready”, and setting up a business “in rented or housing association accommodation”. Some partners saw the impact of this on participating individuals, which they said was “incredible”.

Impact on local services

Research Question 3: What difference has the CHANGE Hub made to the services working with children and families locally?

Partnership working

It was supposed to be just eight services working together to try and create some change. But there was other services that wanted to be involved and it became a strong network with 26 organisations on it.

Those working for local services very much appreciated the opportunity to work together in partnership as part of the CHANGE Hub. They said that the CHANGE Hub was crucial in “creating conversations” which enabled the partners to form new working relationships, “work with the same aim” and make plans together. The CHANGE Hub partnership was praised for being genuinely cross-sectoral and “joined up”, as well as being “crucial in getting all of us round the table on a regular basis”. One partner noted that “working in partnership can be lip service but I felt it wasn’t that way with the CHANGE project”. The partners involved with the CHANGE Hub said that they “hadn’t been brought together before” and that there was “no way I would be able to make those connections without the CHANGE project”.

Knowledge exchange

We were getting information from them and they were getting information from us.

More specifically, the partners said that the CHANGE Hub gave them the opportunity to share information and contacts which helped them to “understand the area better”. This information proved to be useful for informing their work. At a community level, several organisations mentioned that having access to more local information better enabled them to “signpost” local residents to “help and support” via conversation, social media and newsletters. At a strategic level, two of the partners said that that they had used the information learned through the CHANGE Hub in “discussions with Scottish Government” and “consultation responses to Scottish Government”.

Upskilling

I learned so much from Children in Scotland

Some of the partners said that they had learned new workplace skills through being part of the CHANGE Hub, including writing successful funding applications, using an “improvement methodology” in the CHANGE project and beyond, and using Webinex.

Anticipated legacy of CHANGE

Research Question 4: What are the expected longer term (3-5 year) impacts of CHANGE?

Improved outcomes for local families

People have received support to improve their family life and have a happier healthier life, in an area that needs it.

Thinking strategically, the partners noted that the CHANGE project focused around “drivers in the national improvement framework for Scottish Government” to “help to build equity for our children and families” which would have an ongoing impact in the community.

The partners felt that improving childcare in the local area would ultimately enhance employability (particularly for mothers). This could allow them to access “education or training” and build “skills and knowledge”, and “get back to work” for “additional income”. The parents might also “gain confidence” and “build relationships” and “focus on other issues that they’ve got going on in their life” for example having “the opportunity to clean their house, go to the hairdresser, do the shopping” which could be a “light at the end of the tunnel” and a “relief” for parents under pressure. The partners felt that in the longer term these changes would help parents to “make better decisions, better choices” and “get out of poverty” which would have “improved outcomes for children”.

Some partners had worked with specific local families that benefitted from more direct involvement with the CHANGE project – notably those that took part in local interventions. It was felt that they “have benefited in a natural organic way” and had already started to gain from some of the anticipated positive outcomes.

Legacy work instigated by the CHANGE project

What we are trying to create is pathways of support for things that somebody may want to continue.

Actions taken by CHANGE staff to secure the legacy of the CHANGE project included:

- Reporting on project findings and “lessons learned”
- “Making an animation for the families locally to see what we’ve done”
- Exploring the possibility for the CHANGE Hub to “sit within another organisation” so that it would continue beyond the original scope of the project.
- Looking for opportunities for two of the Family Champions to continue as they “are really engaged and still trying to make a difference”
- Costing up a “scoping proposal” for emergency family childcare for the Health and Social Care Partnership and presenting it “as high as it can go”

Other ongoing work and projects

This is going to have the biggest impact on child poverty and raising attainment and economic activity, so it is going to be an area of focus for us. With them not there anymore it will still be a part of our business because that's where the need is.

Other partners had plans to continue elements of CHANGE in some form, including:

- Continuation of the 'Plot to Plate' food and nutrition project
- Ongoing work between a Health Worker and "families disengaged from schools"
- One national partner has plans to "seek further funding to put a worker in Glasgow"
- One partner has plans to "start a new project about access to childcare as we're implementing a solution that they highlighted"
- One partner has plans to have a greater focus on local childcare in the future, stating "we didn't see it as our role, now we see we could have a role to play"
- The creation of a "directory on food" to be incorporated into the ALISSE system
- Ongoing relationships, signposting and referrals between CHANGE Hub partners

Strategic influence

The Scottish Government were on the journey with us and helping us to do the work. It felt like they were interested and not just in the financial side of it, they could see the difference and they were passionate as much as we were.

Several partners said that they felt the CHANGE project would have ongoing strategic influence. As mentioned earlier partners had already been using project information when working with the Scottish Government, and the interest that the Scottish Government and Local Authority had taken in the project was highly appreciated and considered positive. The partners felt that the work had "translated up to the strategic level" and that as a consequence related policy would be "more informed" and "less top down", as well as being "disseminated out for local practice" in Glasgow and beyond. In practice the partners had been directed by their new strategic contacts to "different funds we could apply to get the projects up and running" and it was anticipated that as a result "some of the changes will happen".

Scotland-wide value

They should expand to different areas to replicate what they have done here. Work with different Local Authorities with similar demographics or issues.

Many of the partners felt that the learnings from the CHANGE project would have value if applied to other regions in Scotland. They anticipated that "the learning will be widely disseminated and widely used", and that in particular the model of working could be usefully applied to other "really deprived areas" and "people on the margins of Scotland".

Enablers of success

The partners noted a number of factors that they felt enabled the success of the CHANGE project, and these are detailed in the following section.

A model for making a strong case using local knowledge

CHANGE have shown a really good model of consultation with parents, genuine in-depth consultation about what people's needs are, and working with them longer term.

The partners felt that the CHANGE project team had been “very immersed in their local community” and “went far and wide to reach quite a lot of families” and that ultimately the project “empowered” local people and “gave that voice to what the community has told us”. It was felt that this process was “beneficial for the families to get their voices heard” and gave decision-makers “something tangible to hear about situations that are happening” and that it had been “good to hear it from the local community directly rather than from services”.

Providing a central co-ordinating point

There has to be a central project because you're working across so many different sectors and that is quite difficult.

The partners appreciated Children in Scotland filling the role of being a central co-ordinating point. The partners believed that this was vital to the success of the CHANGE project because “there is a lot of red tape” and the partners were “very busy with our own jobs” so “there's no way I could have managed the admin of this”. As well as arranging meetings and being a point of regular contact, the partners appreciated receiving general advice as well as longer term “SMART and measurable” plans and “vision” from Alison. Several project partners noted that Alison had been ideal in this role, as she was “driven”, “passionate”, “eager”, “really available” and “particularly skilled” as well as being “very active in the community”.

Buy-in from decision-makers

They see the bigger picture from national down to local level.

The partners felt that overt and enthusiastic buy-in from policy-level partners had played a key role in the success of the CHANGE project. In particular they appreciated the participation of the Scottish Government and Local Authority in the CHANGE Hub, and more specifically attendance from the DWP, Housing and Health Improvement departments. It was felt that these partners were “quite active in the group” and “very interested in what is happening”, which ultimately would contribute to enabling “wider system changes”.

Challenges faced

The partners noted a number of challenges faced by the CHANGE project, and these are detailed in the following section.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

We're all working from home, we're not visiting people or seeing them face-to-face, we're not seeing the work on the ground.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a number of impacts on project activity and delivery - largely caused by not being able to meet with local people or partners face-to-face - although individuals have tried to keep in touch as best they can. It was noted that Covid-19 has led to more local families being "on their knees" in greater need than ever, and that there might be an (as yet unknown) impact on future funding opportunities. There was also some disappointment that the project could not close in a "non Covid time" so that it could be properly "tied up" and "celebrated", along with a worry that "we may have lost some of that richness" by finishing the project remotely.

Timescale and continuity of funding

We can't just dip in and dip out again. In very deprived areas there needs to be a long term strategy and long term sustainable funding attached to it.

The partners appreciated that this project had continued for four years because "good work doesn't happen overnight" and the local community are "sick of people being there for a short time, saying they are going to make change, then going away again". However, the partners noticed that it had taken time for the CHANGE project to "come together", to "understand what everyone was doing", and to "break down some pre-conceived ideas". As such, some of the partners felt that the CHANGE project was "over-ambitious in terms of the timescale" and that "to really make change it needs to be there for longer". As such, the partners would have preferred to see an even longer project period and "would support further funding for the project" because "we really really need this".

Challenges relating to Family Champions

A lot of people wanted to meet with the Family Champions, but they were not turning up and meetings were getting cancelled at the last minute. It reinforced that decisions were made without their input.

It proved difficult to recruit active Family Champions and "there was a bit of a drop-off" in numbers. Additionally, at a strategic level "the opportunities for them to make a difference at a higher level have just not happened", in some cases because partners failed to keep appointments with them. It was noted that "there's only so many times we can put them out there" before their wellbeing or confidence would be eroded.

In conclusion

Overall response to the CHANGE project was extremely positive and it was described by the partners as being: “really really useful”, “incredible”, “crucial”, “irreplaceable”, and “invaluable”. The partners said that “it has made a really big difference” and will be “a big loss” in the community when the funding ends.

The model developed and used by the CHANGE project was extremely strong, being highly immersed in the local community and building relationships based on trust. This worked both with local families at a community-level, and amongst local services to develop a thriving CHANGE Hub. As such, the CHANGE project has gathered evidence to make a genuinely informed case around local need and it has created a more connected community. The focus on learning from local people was supported by services and policy professionals that have wanted to listen, which has worked particularly well.

Being based on relationships CHANGE has taken time, and the partners felt that more could have been achieved if more time had been available. The Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions also exacerbated local need and limited face-to-face activity in the final year.

However, it is believed that the networks developed across the course of the project are sufficiently embedded in the local community to mean that elements of the project will continue beyond the official project period. At this point it is also anticipated that there will be a longer-term positive legacy of employability and wellbeing outcomes for local families and their children.

The CHANGE project has driven this work and these outcomes, and the partners were clear that it would not have been possible without CHANGE in a co-ordinating and visionary role.