

Children's Communities Initiative Evaluation

*Summary Paper*



**Children's Communities Initiative Evaluation**

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# Summary

This summary of our evaluation approach has been prepared **by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR), in partnership with the Sheffield Institute of Education (SIOE), at Sheffield Hallam University.** CRESR and SIOE have a track record of successful collaboration and bring together a unique set of skills and experience relevant to this evaluation: area-based initiatives, service improvement, outcomes for children and families.

CRESR is one of the leading policy research and evaluation centres in the United Kingdom. Our work encompasses public services, the voluntary and community sectors, labour markets, housing, regeneration, and urban and regional policy. We have a particular focus on the working in disadvantaged places and with vulnerable groups and our client list includes the Big Lottery Fund (England, Scotland and UK), Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, the Northern Ireland Government, Economic and Social Research Council, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Chartered Institute of Housing, local authorities, and local and national charities.

The SIOE team brings extensive research and evaluation expertise around early years, children, young people and families, education, learning and the wider aspects of children and young people’s lives. Clients and funders include the Department for Education, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Education Endowment Foundation, National College for Teaching and Leadership, Gatsby, Booktrust, Big Lottery, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Economic and Social Research Council, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, local authorities and charities.

Table 1 summarises the approach.

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Table 1: Summary of Proposal

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **SCUK Criteria** | **How we meet and exceed requirements** | **Reference in tender** |
| 1 | Understanding Save the Children's requirements and technical experience  | **A specialist team has been drawn together in response to the particular requirements of the specification**. Our combined team brings together a unique skills set and we have outlined in this proposal an approach that we believe represents the most effective means of delivering the project to the specific requirements set out in the tenderWe suggest a **mixed-method approach** that builds on the theories of change developed by the Children's Communities to capture **changes in local systems leading to improved outcomes for children and families**, thus combining both *process* and *impact*Our **approach is** **co-produced**: working closely with SCUK and the Children's Communities to deliver formative evaluation which is responsive to local needs and support to build local capacity. | Section 2 in the tender document presents our approach to the evaluation |
| 2 | Experience | We have an **established record in carrying out complex evaluations of area-based initiatives which aim to improve outcomes for children and families**, combining local and national assessments of impact, and of conducting research with local partnerships, schools and service providers in the voluntary and community, public and private sectors. Proposed team members are **highly experienced in the application of the range of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies** and techniques relevant to this study, in particular we bring expertise in using participatory methods with children, young people and families.The team is **experienced in supporting local partnerships**: for instance we have supported 21 Talent Match partnerships to develop and implement systems for data capture and analysis.  | Section 3 of this tender summarises our experience, and includes details of the proposed team and referees |
| 4 | Communication and Learning  | **The team has an extensive track record in providing learning and evaluation support**.. We have supported an array of voluntary and community sector organisations (local and national) to implement monitoring and evaluation systems, including training peer researchers.**We outline a comprehensive approach to the communication and learning** through a clear proposal for activities which will deliver real time learning to with key stakeholders: SCUK, Children's Communities and the evaluation steering group. The **team has considerable expertise** in both learning and influencing activities. Our research has a national and international profile and has been used in the media, by think tanks, Government and in parliamentary Select Committees. Our track record suggests that we are able to effectively persuade others, whether in the workings of local partnerships, work with the national media or in advisory roles to Government.  | Our approach to communication and learning is contained at Section 2 |
| 6 | Project management and team | We have **identified clear roles and responsibilities** for all team members and confirm that we have the necessary resources in place to conduct the evaluation over three years. **CRESR has a track record of 30 years in the successful delivery of contracts.** We have well established systems for all aspects of project management (including quality assurance, ethics, health and safety and data security) many of which are externally scrutinised and subject to validation.  | Roles and responsibilities for team members are outlined at Section 3 |
| 7 | Workplan | We have included a **clear delivery plan** which sets out activities, milestones and outputs for the duration of the evaluation.  | The delivery plan is included at Section 3 |

Structure of the evaluation approach

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows:

* Section 1 outlines our understanding of Save the Children UK's requirements and technical experience
* Section 2 summarises our experience, and includes details of the proposed team and referees

# Understanding Save the Children's requirements and technical experience

1. An overview of the proposed approach

The Children's Communities Initiative brings together key agencies within disadvantaged localities to improve outcomes for children. It thus embodies a systems approach to overcoming disadvantage, and an evaluation which seeks to capture the workings and impact of the programme requires a systems-based methodological approach. It will also be important that the evaluation is flexible: it requires a methodology which will respond to local contexts and priorities and gather evidence which presents a comprehensive assessment of process and impact across diverse interventions. We will build on the thinking that has informed the development of Children's Communities and draw on theory-based complex systems evaluation models in our own practice and that of others to create a **systems-based evaluation** model specific to this study.

This requires a staged process as follows:

***i) Mapping of change processes at different local system levels for each Children's Community area***

Our previous work on area-based and systems approaches to evaluation indicates that we need to consider three system levels, and their interactions in the local context:

a) The **local area** level - the structures and relationships between organisations, policy makers and change agents within the locale that can provide the circumstances for positive outcomes for children and young people in the area.

b) The **organisational** level - the cultures and processes, leadership and practices of key organisations working to improve outcomes for children and young people.

c) The **beneficiary** level - the experiences of children and young people, and their families, interacting with resources and practices aiming to improve opportunities and outcomes for them.

Changes at each of these levels interact with others within the local political, economic, social, historical and geographical contexts that lead, it is hoped, to emergent, enduring system level change.

Once the key structures, organisations and beneficiary groups are mapped out, we will work with local stakeholders in the Children's Communities to further develop their initial theories of change at each of the three levels - and the overarching system level - indicating what changes would be expected to be seen at each level in each locale. This would be used to guide the data collection in each location, and inform analysis and interpretation. Figure 2.1 lays out a sketched example of what this might look like for one of the areas, Wallsend Children’s Community, using simplified, illustrative data. In reality of course this would be more complex, drawing on a set of nested logic models using real data from early mapping conversations and other evidence. The data gathering outlined below is described in more detail in the rest of this section.

Figure 1.1: Simplified, illustrative example of developing a systems-based theory of change to inform evaluation: Wallsend

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Starting points** |  | Loss of heavy industry led to cultural dislocation and wide range of problems for children and young people. Aim to overcome these by providing offer equivalent to more advantaged areas. Focus on three areas: Getting things right early (GTRE); Being fit for life (BFL); Realising aspirations and acting in new ways (RA) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Local area level** |  | **Organisational level** |  | **Beneficiary level** |
| **Inputs** |  | Creation of effective governance and leadership structures |  | Development of cadre of TMs (GTRE); Building mental health assessment and support (BFL); develop out of school activity programme (RA) |  | Identification of target beneficiaries for support |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Processes, intermediate outcomes** |  | Development of shared approach; demonstration of effective cross-area strategic collaboration; effective oversight of organisational and beneficiary level actions |  | provision of high quality, targeted support and activities by TMs (GTRE), mental health support (BFL), out of school activities (RA)  |  | positive experiences and changed behaviours of children and young people involved in GTRE/BFL/RA activities and support |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **longer term outcomes** |  | Sustainable, high-functioning area-level strategic governance of effective actions across the area |  | sustainable, well evidenced support provided to meet agreed needs of all children and young people in the area |  | measurable changes in relevant outcomes for children and young people involved in GTRE/BFL/RA activities and support |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **System level outcomes** |  | More positive behaviours in the area as a whole.Children and young people in Wallsend have the same life chances as those in more advantaged areas.  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Target of data gathering** |  | Examination of documentation; observation of partnership working; interviews with strategic leads; analysis of traditional and social media |  | Interviews with leaders and ground level deliverers; documentary evidence. |  | Range of data from case studies selected across the three strands; cross-sectional quantitative data. |

***ii. Organising data collection at each level***

The set of interlocking theories of change will suggest data collection to be gathered in each location both in relation to impact and processes leading towards impact.

## Proposed methodology

### Process evaluation

The system-theory of change for each area will guide both the sampling and design of instruments at each level. We lay out sampling approaches and design issues below separately for each system level for ease, but in practice, of course, these will be closely linked together.

Costings contained in Schedule 1 indicate how we anticipate deploying resources across and between elements of the evaluation design. In order to be as responsive as possible to local needs in each of the three Children's Communities the process evaluation is a set of ***resource packages*** for each geographical area, to be utilised in a way that will gather the most appropriate and rigorous data suite for each case. This means that the actual deployment of this resource package will differ for each area, and therefore our initial considerations below are liable to alter as our thinking around system-based theories of change in each area is developed.

### Area-level data

The area-level data will be collected through qualitative research with key stakeholders. We anticipate the majority of those interviewed to be re-interviewed longitudinally, subject to changes in roles and development of the strategic partnership. We will sample participants and organisations each year, as follows:

* interviews with respondents identified during the scoping phase as strategically important, likely to include strategic board members and system leaders with strategic investment in the initiative (indicative number: 10x1 hour interviews per area per year)
* observation of strategic encounters e.g. strategy board meetings, operational meetings (indicative number: 10x 1 hour observations per area per year)
* analysis of documentation e.g. meeting minutes, terms of reference, strategic planning documents (indicative resource allocation: 10 hours of analysis time per area per year)
* analysis of social and traditional media in the local area to provide an assessment of changes in discourses around children and young people's outcomes and experiences (indicative resource allocation: 10 hours of analysis time per area per year)

The focus of the interviews and analysis of data will vary each year, and will derive from the theory of change. It is likely that data collection will focus on the following:

* In Year 1, prior relationships between strategic partners, planning, expected outcomes, anticipated contextual variation, potential emerging strengths and challenges
* In Year 2, developing relationships, intermediate outcomes at area-level, challenges and problems - and responses to them, any shifts in the focus of the project
* In Year 3, emerging intermediate and longer term outcomes at area-level, reflections on challenges and changes in direction, sustainability of the medium and longer term

### Organisation-level data

Organisational-level data will be gathered through qualitative research with representatives of agencies engaged in Children's Community partnerships. We anticipate around half to three quarters of the sample at least to be re-interviewed each year (depending on changes in focus of the Children's Communities at area level), to provide a longitudinal perspective but allow for some new perspectives as the programme progresses. Participants and organisations will be sampled each year, as follows.

* interviews with leaders in organisations identified during the scoping phase as operationally crucial (indicative number: 5 x1 hour interviews per area per year), likely to include:
* In Wallsend: providers of Transition Mentors [at each of the three identified transition points], provider/s of mental health support in primary schools and Public Health Needs Assessment, providers of out of school activities programme
* In Pembury: Pembury Community Centre, providers of the Pembury Pass Project; organisations supporting networks of parents
* In Collyhurst: Collyhurst Forest Schools campus and providers of the Collyhurst tracker
* interviews with those providing support and activities to families, children and young people from within these organisations (indicative number: 10 x1 hour interviews per area per year)

As with the strategic level data, the focus of the interviews and analysis of data will vary each year, and will derive from the theory of change. It is likely that data collection will focus on the following:

* In Year 1, early planning, experience of training/development or activities and resources, early experiences of work with families, children and young people; potential emerging strengths and challenges
* In Year 2, intermediate outcomes at organisational level, challenges and problems - and responses to them, any shifts in the focus of the project at organisational level
* In Year 3, emerging intermediate and longer term outcomes at organisational level, reflections on challenges and changes in direction, sustainability for the medium and longer term from an organisational perspective

### Beneficiary-level data

The focus of beneficiary level data will be on understanding the experiences of children and families benefitting from developments in services in Children's Communities:

* developing a set of **longitudinal case studies**, selected to represent the variety of beneficiaries (children, young people, families) that are a focus of the individual Children's Communities in each area (indicative number: 5-7 cases per area, tracked over the three years)
* additional **cross-sectional mini-cases** each year to supplement these more detailed cases (indicative number: up to 10 further mini-cases per area per year)

The cases will be focussed on a key beneficiary (usually a child or young person). In most cases, the family will also be involved. It is important to note that we will integrate data with that gathered from those supporting the beneficiary at the organisational level (e.g. youth workers, community centre workers/volunteers, transition mentors etc.), to create a rounded case perspective combining beneficiary, family, and support perspectives together.

At the beneficiary level, we suggest a range of approaches will be needed, depending on the beneficiary group. We propose adopting the Mosaic Approach, developed by Clark and Moss (2001)[[1]](#footnote-1) to undertake research with very young children. This multi-method approach utilises observations, child conferencing and a range of participatory methods, such as painting, photography, child-led walks, games, role play and interaction with puppets - chosen to elicit authentic, valid data from young even non-verbal participants.

We recognise the value of using a variety of methods, especially with very young children (under three years of age) where verbal and written modes would not be appropriate (Flewitt, 2005)[[2]](#footnote-2). To hear the voices of the very young visual data collection techniques can be more appropriate for capturing 'non-verbal communicative practices and meaning making' (Hackett and Yamada-Rice, 2015:29)[[3]](#footnote-3). Such methods include multimodal transcription, walking maps (showing areas that children access most often in their physical environment), still images, drawings etc. Older children and young people can often find the use of digital methods in data collection engaging (Hall, Pahl and Pool, 2015)[[4]](#footnote-4). Digital media are often a part of their everyday life and using ipads, smart phones, video cameras, Skype, factime, video diaries etc. can be a positive way of involving young people and giving them choice.

These **authentic participatory methods** offer a range of tools that play to the strengths of young children, but can be extended to older children and families to augment the traditional interview and focus group approaches. We therefore propose a varied menu of qualitative methods that are active, accessible and engaging for beneficiaries that are not necessarily reliant on the written or spoken word. This scope for flexibility and creativity will elicit rich data gathering to form a 'living picture' of the experiences and impacts of the initiatives on local people.

The focus of the data at this level will necessarily vary each year, be fluid and driven by the experiences of the child, young person and family, so the following areas of focus must be seen as broad topic areas for analysis

* In Year 1, experiences of initial engagement with the Children's Community, past experiences, expectations of benefits, reflection on early experiences and relationships
* In Year 2, continuing reflections on experiences, any perceived immediate or medium term benefits, challenges, reasons for continuing engagement/disengagement
* In Year 3, final reflections on experiences, challenges, emerging intermediate and longer term sustainable outcomes for the beneficiary, family and more widely,

### Analysis

Data will be written up, part-transcribed and securely stored for analysis. Thematic cross-area and within area analysis will be deployed, using coding themes drawing from the research questions and theory of change, entering data into an excel spreadsheet as a case by theme matrix, allowing both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The thematic analysis will utilise a Framework Analysis (Smith and Davies, 2010)[[5]](#footnote-5) approach - involving gaining an initial overview of the data, building an initial framework drawing on research questions, then detailed coding or charting data according to themes from the framework and finally interpreting the data within the framework.

### Mapping methods to evaluation questions

In the table below, we map the overarching evaluation questions to broad methods. In any evaluation, discussion of the priority questions needs to be defined and agreed at the start, so we would wish to discuss any sub-questions in the scoping phase.

Table 1.1: Mapping methods to evaluation questions

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **IMPACT** | **PROCESS** |
| **Area-level** | **Organisation level** | **Beneficiary level** |
| How and to what extent are Communities embodying the key principles of the Children’s Communities model?  |  | **✓** | **✓** |  |
| Is there evidence of Children’s Communities working towards long term systems change? | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** |  |
| How effective are leadership and governance arrangements? |  | **✓** | **✓** |  |
| How are the Communities progressing with developing and operationalising the local strategic vision and theory of change?  |  | **✓** | **✓** |  |
| What evidence is there of impacts within services and systems?  | **✓** | **✓** |  |  |
| What evidence is there of impacts for children and young people and families?  | **✓** |  | **✓** | **✓** |

### Data systems and Impact analysis

The data systems and impact analysis strand of work has two purposes:

* to generate an evidence base from which to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Children's Communities Initiative on beneficiaries (children, young people and families), organisations, the children community areas and the system level
* to provide the Children's Community projects with a dashboard to monitor their own progress and develop models of delivery.

This section details the four core elements of the data systems and impact analysis strand in turn:

* identifying the data to collect
* the proposed data collection mechanisms
* the production of dashboards and support
* analysis of impact and effectiveness for the Children's Communities.

### Identifying indicators

Logic models will be derived for each of the Children's Communities and used to determine the indicators that need to be collected at each of the levels articulated above: overall system level, area level, organisational level and the beneficiary level. Logic models provide a simplification of the relationship between the design of the programme and its assumptions, the resources being committed to a programme, to the outputs, outcomes and impact. The separation of these terms is a crucial step in the design of any evaluation framework by providing a circle of assumption testing, data gathering, analysis and learning. Clarifying the logic models for each of Children's Community will take place within the first 6 weeks of the study and will draw on:

* a desk based extensive review of all available strategic documentation
* visits and interviews with key local stakeholders
* theories of change developed by each of the Children's Communities.

These activities will identify the key common and Children's Community specific measures to describe the following aspects:

* what are the **assumptions** which underpin each Children's Community; for instance, these might include the skills and track record of staff, or the range of statutory service involved
* what are the **inputs** - the financial and staffing resources -that have been used to provide the Children's Communities; this includes resources provided directly by Save the Children as well as any resources that have been levered in from other sources
* what are the **activities** provided and in particular what is the sequence of activities which may lead to a successful outcome
* what are the **outputs** in terms of the numbers assisted; for instance, these may be the numbers engaged or who have participated in given activities
* what are the **short, intermediate and long term outcomes** that participants may achieve as a result of the funded project; these will cover the holistic focus of the Children's Communities, including: child development and learning, social and emotional development, family functioning, health and mental wellbeing, housing, community participation, poverty and employability and local economic development
* what are the longer term **system and societal impacts** on the Children's Community areas
* what are the **contextual, mediating, moderating and enabling factors** which affect the efficiency of the Children's Communities in providing 'output' and the effectiveness of their activities in achieving outcomes?

### Data collection

This section details how the evaluation will collate the range of indicators identified in the logic models. Data collection is likely to fall into five broad types:

1) **Individual level beneficiary data** will be collected via client monitoring systems. Examples of the data to be collected will include: socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. age, sex, ethnicity, family characteristics, educational attainment and receipt of free school meals), participation in and experiences of funded projects and outcome measures covering the holistic focus identified above. This data will allow monitoring of activities/outputs, progress and outcomes. Because the data is at an individual level the evaluation will also be able to test and identify relationships between contextual mediating and moderating factors, activities and outcomes to answer questions such as what works, for whom and in what circumstances. The specification rightly identifies the importance of collecting individual beneficiary level data if the evaluation is to be able to isolate discernible impacts of Children's Communities. This emerged as an overriding finding from the national evaluation of the New Deal Communities, which was undertaken by the proposed team. However any proposed data collection will need to be considerate of the additional demands placed on providers or beneficiaries. Within the initial visits to the Children's Communities we will discuss options for collecting and managing client data, including whether they already have plans to use a client monitoring system. The evaluation team will then put in place a system which meeting the needs and requirements of both the evaluation and Children's Communities. For example in the past we have used SNAP Survey software to capture data. Client monitoring systems in this format have proved readily accessible and easy to return, whilst also minimising data processing work.

We propose that this beneficiary level data would be collected at multiple time points, to be agreed with the Children's Communities. These are likely to include: when a beneficiary first engages with the Children's Communities, this will provide a baseline against which to assess outcome change, and follow-ups at six and twelve eighteen months to identify short and medium term change.

2) The individual beneficiary data, collected by the Children's Communities, would be supplemented with **individual level administrative data**. For example we would look to access beneficiary data from the National Pupil Database. This would be linked to their beneficiary data in 1) to provide baseline information for beneficiaries (such as prior attainment), hard evidence of outcomes (such as pupil attainment, attendance) and to provide a wider range of contextual information such as eligibility for free school meals (FSM) and gender. The team have a vast amount of expertise in gaining access to NPD data from the Department for Education and using the data alongside other data sources, such as project specific monitoring data to quantify impacts and relationships. We are therefore aware for the permissions that need to be in place from data subjects and already have in place the necessary data storage and processing arrangement to access the data.

3) We would undertake an annual collection of **financial and process information** from the Children Communities. The first wave of the data collection will be undertaken during in early 2017 as part of the baseline data assessment. It will feed into the establishment of a baseline for the Children's Communities and will establish a starting point in terms of their structure, function and their approach. Following the baseline the subsequent data collections will combine questions which: quantify the financial and staffing resourcing inputs; assess achievements and change in delivery; and provide some real-time feedback around issues emerging in the delivery of projects.

4) We will draw upon **area level secondary and administrative data sources** and link these to data for beneficiaries. The data would be accessed at the lowest levels possible and will cover holistic topics such as: socio-demographic information (from the Census), local deprivation (from the index of multiple deprivation (IMD)), health and well-being levels (from public Health England), skills and qualifications (from the Department for Education), local labour market indicators (from the Labour Force Survey, the Department for Work and Pensions Stat Xplore and Nomis), local incomes (from the Annual Survey for Hours and Earnings) and housing information (from the Department for Communities and Local Government). The evaluation will use these data sources to:

* provide a baseline of the characteristics in the Children Community areas against which to assess change
* identify and assess the effect of context mediating and moderating factors on individual level outcomes; for example whether the level of neighbourhood deprivation, measured by the IMD, affects the progress and outcomes achieved by beneficiaries
* assess the wider impact of the programme on wider community level indicators; for example have local schools achieved better results compared to schools in similar places.

5) Finally the evaluation will access **additional secondary datasets** such as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and Understanding Society to contribute to an initial analysis of additionality. Outcome change for beneficiaries - measured from the client monitoring systems outlined in (1) - would be benchmarked against similar 'non-beneficiaries' in the LSYE or Understanding Society. The difference in change will contribute to the assessment of whether outcome change is additional: over and above what would have been expected in the absence of the Children's Communities.

### Dashboards and support

The research team will provide a set of specially designed data visualisation tools to help analyse and present the Children's Communities data. In particular CRESR will develop bespoke data 'dashboards' for the Children's Communities. We will provide interactive webpages which allow the users to customise the data shown in a range of graphs and visualisations, allowing them to hone in on their particular areas of interest. An example in Figure 2.2 shows a drop down menu, allowing users to select which variable is shown on the graph opposite. Figure 2.3 provides a second example of data dashboard summarising activity, outputs and outcomes for the evaluation of Talent Match. Each user can be provided with a log-in and password to securely access their dashboard.

The dashboard will be regularly updated on a quarterly basis with data from the Children's Community project, allowing real time feedback and active learning. This will help to maximise the return on investment from collecting the data.

Figure 1.2: example of an interactive graph from an existing dashboard



Figure 1.3: example of a summary dashboard from the evaluation of Talent match



### Analysis of impact and effectiveness

The monitoring and beneficiary data will be analysed within a Value for Money framework to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Children's Communities. Our approach, which is summarised in Figure 2.4, has been employed by the research team on many similar large scale evaluations. It will be rooted in the logic model framework in Stage 1 and is informed by guidance on evaluating impact ('3R's' guidance[[6]](#footnote-6) and the HM Treasury Magenta[[7]](#footnote-7) and Green[[8]](#footnote-8) Books and Value for Money[[9]](#footnote-9) and Assessment Guidance[[10]](#footnote-10)).

Figure 1.4: A framework for assessing Impact and VFM



Dashed line indicates additional preliminary assessments not requested in the invitation to tender

The assessment will analysis the data identified above using a range the descriptive, inferential and econometric techniques and will be undertaken at an initiative-wide level as well as by the three areas, intervention type and beneficiary group. The analysis will include:

1) Quantifying the **inputs** (financial and staff resources) used in delivering the Children's Communities and assessing how successful the Children's Communities have been at levering in additional support

2) Quantifying the **outputs and activities**: for example the total number of individuals benefiting from projects provided by the Children's Communities. this would address the following questions

* how many children, young people and families have benefited from Children's Communities activities and what activities have they benefited from?
* what are the characteristics of those who have benefited from Children's Communities activities?

3) Calculating the **cost efficiency** of Children's Communities by comparing inputs to outputs/activity.This gives, for example, the average unit cost of working with a beneficiary, which can be compared across different types of project or similar programmes. Where possible we will use econometric analysis and qualitative insights to identify intervention and client level factors which affect the level of cost efficiency.

4) Measuring **outcome change** achieved. We will use the individual level beneficiary and administrative data to measure outcome change - between baseline and follow up assessment - across the spectrum of holistic focus of the Children's Communities. Our analysis will focus on change at a beneficiary level (as opposed to population level change) since this offered the greater level of scientific rigor and robustness.

5) Calculating the **effectiveness** (rate of outcomes to outputs) **and cost effectiveness** (rate of outcomes to inputs) of Children's Communities in delivering outcomes. This would be supplemented by exploratory econometric analysis, for example using multilevel modelling, which would test which individual, intervention and area level factors affect the level of effectiveness and cost effectiveness. This analysis would respond to the question: what works for whom and in what circumstances? Qualitative evidencewould be used to contextualise reasons why given factors affect effectiveness.

The specification states that the evaluation should not attempt to undertake a full economic analysis as Save the Children will be commissioning this work under a separate contract. Providing a robust assessment of the net additional impact of the Children's Communities represents a critical element for the evaluation to gain traction with external stakeholders and to maintain scientific rigor. We suggest providing **preliminary assessments of the level of additionality and cost benefits** achieved by the Children's Communities within the resources provided for this evaluation which can feed into the more focused analysis. The proposed evaluation team has a vast amount of experience in undertaking full Cost Benefit Analysis and Social Return on Investment analysis of similar interventions, included of the New Deal for Communities Programme.

We would explore the **additionality of the Children's Communities** in providing net additional impacts for its participants by triangulating between three sources of evidence:

* **expert interviewer assessment of net additionality** based on evidence supplied from a range of stakeholders, the project case studies and the interviews with beneficiaries.
* **additionally questions** in the beneficiary survey which tease out the beneficiary's perception of additional impact; this would include a mix of soft and hard measures of change.
* **benchmarking outcome change** against that recorded for young people in secondary surveys, such as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and Understanding Society

The evaluation will also explore the **value of monetised benefits and cost savings** emerging as a result of Children's Communities interventions. The team have expertise in valuing outcomes using a range of different approaches, including:

* where a market transaction has taken place, for instance additional economic output produced can be valued using Gross Value Added (GVA) figures.
* calculating exchequer savings, for instance reduced welfare expenditure on benefits or health care
* using softer valuation methods, for instance hedonic pricing and shadow pricing techniques (for example, the National Evaluation of NDC in England, and the Value of Regeneration Evaluation conducted for DCLG in England).

Where possible we will compare these monetised benefits to costs.

### Supporting and developing local evaluation capacity

We are pleased that the specification calls for support and development of local evaluation capacity. Our experience is that strong engagement of local practitioners and professionals means that evaluations are more likely to produce meaningful outputs that lead to positive change. We have worked in a variety of ways in this regard in the past, for example SIOE has an established Research-Engaged Practice Network of teachers; CRESR has supported practitioners in local government and in voluntary and community sector organisations to develop local evaluation capacity. This has involved the delivery of training in specific methods and approaches (eg interviewing, social return on investment), support to commission and carry out local evaluations, and training peer researchers.

We suggest, at the outset of the evaluation, identifying a cadre of ***evaluation leaders***, a small group of professionals in each Children's Community (which could include where relevant the Data, Evaluation and Impact Advisers) well placed to support this external evaluation, provide internal formative evaluation and subsequently provide sustainable evaluation support as - it is hoped - the programme continues to build success over the medium and longer term.

We would intend to develop our engagement with the evaluation leaders in a collaborative manner, ensuring that we worked together in mutually productive ways, but our initial plan is as follows:

* engage with the group in building on local theories of change to develop the system theory
* work with the group to plan a support and work package over the three years of the project, including:
* **providing training** on evaluation methods e.g. participatory research with young children, quantitative data use, survey methods
* **engage evaluation leaders** support in the development and piloting of methods, recruiting and engaging beneficiary and other participants and acting as a reference group for reports; signposting internal evaluation data to the external evaluators; helping quality assure Management and Monitoring Information and other data production
* **acting as evaluation supervisors** for evaluation leaders to undertake their own formative evaluation aimed at improving practice within the Children's Community
* **plan future sustainable evaluation**, towards the end of the evaluation, as the Children's Community develops beyond the end of the external evaluation.

## Communication and shared learning

Both CRESR and SIOE have extensive track records of **action research**, and of **involving project funders, providers and beneficiaries in research and learning**. The following principles will underpin our approach to communication and learning:

* **communication and learning must endeavour to improve the delivery of the programme** and improve outcomes for children. We will seek to work closely with SCUK, Children's Communities and the evaluation steering group to ensure that our work is **responsive to need.**  We will also **monitor the effectiveness and quality** of the communication and learning aspects of the contract
* **learning will be evidence-based** and draw extensively from prior research, the expertise across our team and, crucially, the knowledge and experience of programme partners
* **learning will be underpinned by co-production** including engagement with SCUK and the Children's Communities and joint working with the evaluation steering group to develop an annual learning activities plan
* the approach to communication and learning will need to be **responsive to change**, which may emerge as a result of external events or in response to developments within the programme
* learning will take a **thematic approach** with themes identified by the evaluation team, SCUK, Children's Communities and the steering group.

### Communication and Learning Activities

We have identified a **lead for learning and communication** (Coldwell) who will oversee a number of communication and learning activities:

* **regular update reporting** - short updates on progress, plans and findings to be shared with SCUK and Children's Communities - 6 per year
* **participation in Learning Exchanges and Learning Days** - in agreement with SCUK and the Children's Communities; activities could include presentation of findings, facilitation of thematic sessions; bringing evidence from other evaluations - at least 2 per year
* **populating the Children's Communities website** - regular contributions summarising evaluation evidence and learning and utilising written and video content - at least 4 per year
* **presentations to the evaluation steering group** - 3 per year
* **a named contact (Wilson) for SCUK**, who will act as programme manager and first point of contact for all matters relating to contract delivery and will liaise regularly with SCUK to share emerging learning. We propose a weekly phone call in the first instance, moving to monthly catch-up calls as the evaluation progresses. Regular contact via email will also take place between calls.
* **a named contact for each Children's Community** who will be the first point of contact for all matters relating to delivery of the evaluation, and support in relation to evaluation capacity building. Each contact will liaise regularly with Children's Community stakeholders to support progress and share learning

### Reporting and dissemination

We will produce outputs as outlined in the specification:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Output** | **Date** |
| Interim report  | August 2017 |
| Year One evaluation report | January 2018 |
| Interim report  | July 2018 |
| Year Two evaluation report  | January 2019 |
| Interim report | July 2019 |
| Final evaluation report  | January 2020 |

Evaluation reports will highlight key achievements and issues for each Children's Community and draw out thematic learning across the three areas. Themes will include both those that relate to systems change, and those which highlight good practice in improving outcomes for children. All reports will include standalone summaries which can be widely shared and which will be disseminated via the CRESR and SIOE website and contact lists.

The evaluation team will work with SCUK and the Children's Communities to identify additional opportunities for dissemination. We anticipate that these will include the co-production of papers and articles for appropriate journals and publications, and joint presentations at conferences, seminars and relevant forums.

Both CRESR and SIOE have longstanding reputations for the production of high quality outputs which are accessible, informative and written in plain English. In order to ensure quality we

* **agree plans for research outputs at project inception**. This includes: the timing of interim, draft and final reports; structure and length; audience; publication and dissemination plans
* **review plans regularly**
* ensure protocols for report formatting (e.g. tables and references) are **consistent with client requirements**

## Timetable

Table 2.1 contains a detailed workplan for the evaluation.

Table 2.1 Workplan

| Date | Process | Impact | PM/Reporting |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nov-16 | Inception meeting and design phase | design phase | Inception report |
| Dec-16 | design phase: local mapping | design phase |  |
| Jan-17 | design phase: local mapping | design phase |  |
| Feb-17 | design phase: local mapping | design phase | Update report |
| Mar-17 | design phase: local mapping | design phaseBaseline local profiling | Evaluation framework |
| Apr-17 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Production of CMSBeneficiary and secondary and administrative data collectionFinancial and process data collectionBaseline local profiling Beneficiary data collection | SG meeting (tbc)Update report Data dashboard template finalised  |
| May-17 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection |  |
| Jul-17 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection |  |
| Aug-17 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Interim reportSG meeting (tbc)Learning Event (tbc)Data dashboard Web output |
| Sep-17 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Update report |
| Oct-17 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Data dashboard |
| Nov-17 | Analysis | Beneficiary data collectionAnalysis | Update reportWeb output |
| Dec-17 | Analysis | Beneficiary and secondary and administrative data collectionFinancial and process data collectionAnalysis |  |
| Jan-18 | Analysis | Beneficiary data collectionAnalysis | End Y1 reportSG meeting (tbc)Learning event (tbc)Data dashboard |
| Feb-18 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Web output |
| Mar-18 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Update report |
| Apr-18 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Data dashboard |
| May-18 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection | Update reportSG meeting (tbc)Web output |
| Jun-18 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection |  |
| Jul-18 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection | Interim reportSG meeting (tbc)Learning Event (tbc)Data dashboard |
| Aug-18 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Web output |
| Sep-18 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Update report |
| Oct-18 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Data dashboard |
| Nov-18 | Analysis | Beneficiary data collectionAnalysis | Update report Web output |
| Dec-18 | Analysis | Beneficiary and secondary and administrative data collectionFinancial and process data collectionAnalysis |  |
| Jan-19 | Analysis | Beneficiary data collectionAnalysis | End Y2 reportSG meeting (tbc)Learning Event (tbc)Data dashboard |
| Feb-19 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Web output |
| Mar-19 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Update report  |
| Apr-19 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Data dashboard |
| May-19 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection | Update reportSG meeting (tbc)Web output |
| Jun-19 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection |  |
| Jul-19 | Longitudinal and short case studies | Beneficiary data collection | Interim ReportSG meeting (tbc)Learning Event (tbc)Data dashboard |
| Aug-19 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Web output |
| Sep-19 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Update report |
| Oct-19 | Stakeholder interviews; observations and documentary analysis | Beneficiary data collection | Data dashboard |
| Nov-19 | Analysis  | Beneficiary data collectionAnalysis | Update report Web output |
| Dec-19 | Analysis | Beneficiary and secondary and administrative data collectionFinancial and process data collectionAnalysis |  |
| Jan-19 | Analysis | Beneficiary data collectionAnalysis | Final reportSG meeting (tbc)Learning Event (tbc)Data dashboard |

# Experience

## Summary of relevant experience

This section outlines our experience gained through recent work which is relevant to the Children's Communities evaluation. We have built particular expertise in **evaluating area-based interventions** across a range of policy areas including those which are targeted at improving outcomes for children and families in deprived neighbourhoods. A key example here is the evaluation of New Deal for Communities (NDC) for Communities and Local Government which included improved educational attainment as one of five programme outcomes. We have an established record in carrying out large scale and complex evaluations, combining local and national assessments of impact, and of conducting research with local partnerships and service providers in the voluntary and community, public and private sectors.

Members of the team have worked extensively with **children and families**, including those with complex needs. For example, CRESR has led studies of family support and intervention projects including the national evaluation of Family Support Projects for Communities and Local Government, evaluation of Wakefield Families First Projects for Wakefield District Council, evaluation of Leeds Signpost Family Intervention Project for Leeds City Council, evaluation of Intensive Intervention Projects for the Department for Education, and evaluation of Rochdale Families Project for the New Heart for Heywood NDC and Rochdale Borough Council.

We have experience of **working with partnerships and service providers** to support service transformation. For example, a range of evaluations undertaken by SIOE for the Department of Education have looked at a series of interventions designed to improve attainment and parental engagement in education. Projects have included the evaluation of the Further Mathematics Support Programme, process evaluation of Year 1 Phonics Screening Check Pilot, and an assessment of Children's Experiences of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

We have experiences of utilising **mixed-method approaches** to assess the impact of localised interventions and delivery models to understand what works well in different local contexts. Methodologies regularly deployed by the team include quasi-experimental design and use of comparator areas; cross-sectional and longitudinal-survey design and analysis, small area secondary data analysis, estimation techniques and benchmarking; econometric modelling, cost benefit analysis and value for money; multi-level modelling and multivariate methods, in-depth interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries; focus groups; case study approaches; use of photographic, video and written diaries.

Further examples of relevant projects are provided at 3.4 under evidence of attributes.

## Proposed team and roles

The project will have a clear management structure with the following designated as the core project management team:

* Sarah Pearson and Mike Coldwell will be co-directors of the evaluation and will share responsibility for the evaluation overall, delivery of outputs and quality assurance..
* Ian Wilson will be the Evaluation Manager and have responsibility for overseeing the day to day implementation of the evaluation. He will be the primary contact for SCUK.

Figure 3.1 outlines the team structure for this project. Team members are assigned to specific tasks within the evaluation, with roles and responsibilities for each team member clearly identified through robust project management systems and regular review of tasks.

Figure 2.1 Team Structure and Responsibilities



### Team Members

Brief details of team members' skills and experience are provided below. Full CVs are attached at Appendix 3.

**Sarah Pearson** is Interim Director of CRESR. She is an expert in project and programme evaluation and has particular interests in area based initiatives, neighbourhood and community regeneration, community participation and the role of the voluntary and community sector in new forms of public service delivery. She is currently leading evaluations of Talent Match and Making it Work on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund, and evaluations of public sector service reform programmes for Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (in partnership with Nesta). She has led an impact evaluation of ***myplace*** (youth facilities) on behalf of the Big Lottery and Department for Education. Between 2001 and 2009 she was deputy director of the National Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG). Sarah is a member of DECC's expert evaluators panel and has provided advisory support to the Welsh Assembly Government in developing the evaluation framework for the Communities First Programme. Sarah has considerable experience of presenting research findings to a wide range of audiences, including national and local government, third sector organisations and local community groups.

**Mike Coldwell** isHead of Centre for Development and Research in Education. He has been conducting, managing and directing research projects for government and other organisations for over 17 years. Mike has particular expertise in directing multiple method designs using Realist and other theory-based models and policy research evaluation more broadly. These studies include over 60 mixed methods projects for governmental and other national organisations, with an emphasis on policy evaluation, and school workforce/professional development - most recently with a focus on Evidence-engaged practice in schools. Mike currently leads the DfE Evidence-based Teaching study (with colleagues from UCL Institute of Education and Durham University) and co-directs the Education Endowment Foundation Effective Use of Teaching Assistant evaluation, and led the recently completed NCETM CPD Programme Evaluation; the National College Impact of Grants DfE Exclusion Appeals Study and the National College New Routes to Headship study (with Institute of Education, University of London)

**Ian Wilson** is a Senior Research Fellow who leads its impact analysis work. Ian has worked on research and evaluation projects sponsored by a range of commissioning bodies, including Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, the Scottish Executive, Yorkshire Forward, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the charity SCOPE. Ian has considerable expertise and experience in economic evaluation and econometric/statistical analysis. This includes the application of Cost Benefit Analysis (including the economic valuation of impacts), economic impact analysis, analysis of financial accounts, survey research and the use of advanced statistical methods in the analysis of cross-sectional, multi-level and longitudinal datasets. Much of his work has involved devising innovative methods and solutions for these methods. For example: producing a measure of a Young Person's proximity to the labour market; establishing the monetary value of health impacts from domestic energy improvements to reduce cold homes; identifying the impact of direct payment of housing benefit on tenants rent payment behaviour; and identifying the impact of New Deal Communities (NDC), included pioneering work to monetise the value of 'perceptional' outcomes from regeneration programmes such as NDC.

**Bernadette Stiell** is a Senior Research Fellow with over 20 years social research experience in the fields of education, social policy and social geography. Her research interests focus on the social inclusion and wellbeing of children, young people and families, particularly the wider aspects of learning. Bernadette has led and managed a range of school-based projects for Government Departments and agencies, local authorities, charities and European funders. Using a range of qualitative and mixed methods, these projects have investigated the experiences and views of teachers, pupils and policy makers, covering a range of issues, subjects and curriculum areas. Bernadette has particular expertise in designing innovative and participative methods for children, young people and their families to enable their engagement in the research process.

**Elaine Batty** is a research fellow. Elaine specialises in research in poverty and disadvantages communities, family intervention, and homelessness. Elaine is currently involved in a longitudinal study exploring disadvantage in communities in Northern Ireland. She is also a member of the research team evaluating the Making It Work Programme in Scotland looking at helping lone parents back into work. She was a senior member of the National Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities Programme as well as a member of the team at CRESR that undertook a three year study of Poverty and Place for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

**Dr Caron Carter** is a researcher and teacher in the field of Early Childhood Research, focusing on children’s friendships. She has experience in using innovative methods to engage young children in research and evaluation. Her doctoral research on children's friendships involved children aged five to seven years. She is a member of the editorial board for the Journal of Early Childhood Research.

**Dr Sadie Parr** is a research fellow. Her main research interests lie broadly within the fields of family and parenting policy, crime control and community safety. She has been involved in a number of research projects which explore the socio-political impact of the government's anti-social behaviour policy agenda and has expertise in the evaluation of family and parenting-based policy responses. Sadie has undertaken work with a range of clients including the Scottish Government, Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, Disability Rights Commission and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

### Team support

CRESR has a well-established administrative support team, experienced in the management of complex evaluations. Contract administrative support will be co-ordinated by Louise South, office manager for CRESR. Sarah Ward will provide general administrative support to the project, including being responsible for web-based resources.

As part of a much larger organisation, CRESR and SIOE are actively supported in HR, IT, Marketing, Finance and Contract support needs by teams of specialist administrators.

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