An Ambition Realised?

Our learning

Programme Insights: This series of Programme Insights shares reflections, learning and practical implications from Realising Ambition, a £25m Big Lottery Fund programme that supports the replication of evidence-based and promising interventions designed to improve outcomes for children and young people and prevent them from entering the youth justice system.

Rather than providing a lengthy evaluation report at the end of the five-year programme, this series has provided information about Realising Ambition in bite size chunks. This, the penultimate issue, summarises what we think are the key learning points from the programme. It is a 'think piece' with qualitative reflections from the team. Words highlighted in blue are defined in the glossary.

About us: The Realising Ambition programme is managed by a consortium committed to improving outcomes for children. It is led by Catch22, alongside the Dartington Social Research Unit, Substance and The Young Foundation.

Realising Ambition Programme Insights: Issue 10

Part 1: About Realising Ambition

In 2012, the same year that Realising Ambition was established, 23,000 young people entered the criminal justice system in the UK for the first time. Each individual incident has a significant and negative impact on the well-being of the young person, their family and the wider community. It also has considerable financial implications to the public purse. Despite these consequences there existed only a limited evidence base about which interventions or services are successful in diverting young people from pathways into offending.

This was the context in which Realising Ambition was launched. It aimed to:

- Improve the evidence base of what works, for whom and why in avoiding pathways into offending;

- Promote learning about what it takes to replicate evidence-based interventions; and

- Help commissioners to ask the right questions about evidence, practice and impact.

Five years later and over 160,000 young people across the whole of the UK have engaged with services provided via Realising Ambition. We have accrued a significant amount of learning on replication and the refinement and adaptation of strong services. We now better understand approaches to monitoring outcomes and how to ensure that the fidelity of delivery to the core and effective aspects of the service model are maintained. Our learning has developed about the very real challenges that replicating a service presents to an organisation. We are also undertaking 3 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) as part of Realising Ambition's contribution to understanding 'what works' in preventing youth crime and in improving outcomes for children and young people. (we'll be reporting findings from these in the final programme insight issue later this year). And funded organisations have been supported to further replicate their services or to develop their capabilities to scale.

Part 2: It's all about the five

Realising Ambition has always encouraged generosity and honesty in relation to sharing learning. We think that evidence and learning should support reflection and improvement within organisations, as well as across the wider sector. Generously sharing learning means sharing successes, challenges, and failures. It is in this spirit that this penultimate issue of the Programme Insight series has been written. As such we also reflect on how we as a delivery consortium may have done things differently, with the benefit of hindsight.

The numbers '25' and '5' recur frequently in the Realising Ambition programme: a £25m investment in replicating 25 services over 5 years; 5 key characteristics of a successful replication (see Programme Insight 1); and in this issue we share a summary of our learning in 25 points grouped into 5 categories which we think will be of most interest to funders and delivery organisations, and anyone interested in large-scale efforts to improve children's outcomes:

- Learning about replication and scale;

- Building confidence in a service or activity;

- Building confidence in an organisation;

- Understanding and adapting to new, changing and challenging contexts; and

- Developing, sharing and building on learning to further improve outcomes for children and young people.

Learning about replication and scale

Within Realising Ambition each grantee undertook to reach a specified number of children and/or young people either by expanding the reach of an existing programme or adopting a new programme from elsewhere and implementing in one or more new settings. We refer to this as 'replication'. Here we share some reflections about approaches to replication and scale.

1. There are a range of replication models that help achieve scale.

There are a variety of approaches to replication that help either spread a service across a specific geographical area to expand its footprint or to grow the number of sites in which the service is delivered. Scale may be achieved via the direct delivery of a service, or through a social franchise or dissemination model (see Programme Insight 5 for more on this). One approach is not necessarily better than another. What is important is getting the right fit between organisation, service and context, and if necessary, adapting the replication or scale model as the need arises.

There are trade-offs to be made between approaches. A dissemination model, where copying a technique or resource is actively encouraged, exerts little control and as a result quality of implementation can be variable. On the plus side, rapid expansion to large numbers is possible and may suit simpler or tech-based interventions (see The Ariel Trust's It's Not OK case study). Direct delivery, social franchise and affiliation models tend to exert tighter controls on quality and tend to have supportive infrastructure, like data systems which are understood and used across delivery organisations. The down side to this approach is that it is much harder to get rapid, large-scale expansion. They are probably better suited to more complex interventions and ones that have been tried and tested in multiple settings (see Barnardo's Northern Ireland's PATHS and Life Skills Training case studies).

Relevant to all approaches, be they early stage innovations or well-established services, is the value of routine scrutiny of how things are going on the ground. This could be with regular data collection, ad hoc enquiry or other methods. What matters most is that feedback loops are established so that potential challenges or problems are spotted early and necessary adjustments are made (see YMCA Scotland's Plusone Mentoring case study).

2. Adaptation is central to replication: it paves the way for innovation and the flexibility to adapt to changing contexts.

Realising Ambition has shown us that the skill in replication is knowing what to adopt and replicate in the first place, and in doing so what not to change in the process (i.e. the core elements of the service: the things that make it work). We've also learnt about the importance of adaptation rather than rigid replication: knowing what aspects of a service may be changed to make it fit into a new context or make people want to use it (i.e. the surface components).

In an environment of cuts to public expenditure and greater competition, the capacity to adapt has become all the more important. Valuable lessons have also come from wider attempts to replicate evidence-based programmes nationally and internationally. In the earlier stages of Realising Ambition we took a hard line and required rigid fidelity to a core service delivery model, which, in retrospect, was sometimes to the detriment of permitting carefully planned and tested adaptations (see Programme Insight 1).

3. Don't underestimate the time and effort it requires to get a new service up and running at full speed: it will impede improvement efforts.

The nuts and bolts of replicating a service and ensuring the basics are in place competes with time and resource for thoughtful adaptation and testing. In Realising Ambition, for the most part, it took delivery organisations around two years until they could really focus on planning changes and tracking the effect. Even in the context of a programme such as Realising Ambition, where the funder was supportive and there was help on hand in the form of training and coaching to make improvements, delivery organisations

struggled to carve out time and funds to do this type of work as they were so focused on meeting delivery and commissioning objectives. The same is true for social business model development and sustainability planning, as introduced in point 12.

4. Fail to involve users and practitioners in developing adaptations at your peril.

In Realising Ambition it became abundantly clear that service users and practitioners were one of the best sources of ideas for adaptation (see Barnardo's Northern Ireland's All Stars case study). They were able to say, for example, what made services unappealing or hard to access, which in turn provided targets for change and testing. We didn't realise the importance of advocating for this approach early enough across the programme, yet many of our delivery partners had considerable expertise in staff and user involvement. We concentrated on fidelity to the detriment of co-production.

5. Replicating another organisation's service can create tensions, especially when adaptations are needed to tightly licensed models or evidence-based programmes.

There is an expectation, particularly from some developers, that evidence-based programmes are delivered exactly as designed. The rationale being that if you want to replicate the effects of a programme you need to replicate the activities precisely. The developers and owners of evidence-based programmes tend to have little tolerance for significant adaptation and testing, let alone tweaking or changing. However, our experience has been that adaptation is key to replication and arguably human nature's default position is to personalise and change things. On occasions these were difficult tensions to reconcile (see Oxford Brookes University's Strengthening Families Programme 10-14 UK case study).

6. The process of replication does not follow a linear path.

Appealing as it is to believe there is an end-point to developing and testing new interventions, in reality there are always opportunities to

refine and improve services, perhaps to make them more effective or better value for money. As such, replication is more of a journey than a destination: one that includes cul-de-sacs and unplanned routes. We encouraged delivery organisations with Realising Ambition to use data and feedback to continuously reflect, learn and adapt (see Programme Insight 4). To this end, we developed, tested and refined a framework to support reflection, improvement efforts and confidence related to aspects of service refinement as well as organisational aspects of delivery and sustainability (discussed in the next two sections). This we called The Confidence Framework, and is further introduced in Part 3.

Building confidence in a service or activity

One mantra in Realising Ambition has been that 'evidence is confidence', evidence is not the whole truth. Evidence cannot prove an assertion like 'our service works' or 'our service is replicable'. It can however, improve the confidence that we – and others – have in our claims.

Naturally, we are interested in the impact that services have because our focus has been on scaling impact, but we have asked other questions as well. What activity to replicate? How well and consistently is a service being replicated? Are people engaging with the service? Does it represent good value for money? Is it sustainable? To answer these varied questions it follows that different types of evidence are required.

7. Good replication requires knowledge of what is core and what is adaptable in a service.

The trick to replicating is not only finding a service or an activity that can make an impact (i.e. it works) but making it appeal to potential users (i.e. they want it) and to practitioners (i.e. they can and want to deliver it) and to funders (i.e. they see value in commissioning it). The service may require tweaks and changes to increase appeal, reach or deliverability. The risk is that in making the tweaks, things get changed that shouldn't be. As such, it is important to distinguish between core and

adaptable elements, and making this distinction is as much an art as it is a science.

8. Logic models help highlight the core and adaptable components in a service.

Within Realising Ambition all delivery organisations were supported to produce logic models: articulations of how key activities are expected to lead to changes in intermediate and longer-term outcomes, supported by evidence for such claims. Various tools and guidance were provided as well as hands on training and facilitation to help organisations produce these resources. As a result of this investment, all the services have strong articulations of what they do, why and how they do it and to what end. Of course, having something on paper doesn't mean that practice on the ground is necessarily better, but all organisations reported benefiting from the process of thinking about the what, why and how of their service (see The Anne Frank Trust's Schools and Ambassadors Programme case study).

9. Implementation manuals help ensure consistent delivery of the 'core' (with fidelity) but also give permission to make appropriate adaptations.

An implementation manual sets out in reasonable detail the rationale for the service and what it takes to deliver it well, covering things like what staff do when working with service users, for how long and how often, referral pathways and person specifications. The core elements are highlighted and, typically, data is collected on these to monitor fidelity. The adaptable elements are made clear, and ideally, include suggestions for flexing. A good manual accompanied with simple, reliable data collection contributes to better fidelity with the core delivery features.

10. A consistent and rigorous approach to monitoring outcomes helps inform adaptations and learning about impact.

Understandably most funders and commissioners want evidence of the positive impact of a service and Realising Ambition was no exception. Robust

outcome data was required. To aid this an outcomes framework covering a broad range of potential outcomes and accompanying validated measures was developed (see Programme Insight 4). This sought to prevent each delivery organisation re-inventing the wheel and to ensure some comparability across organisations. Although hard to accommodate the needs of 25 varied services in one framework, it certainly led to an overall improvement in the reliability and validity of outcome data. Regular reflection on what the data was saying helped organisations consider what they might adapt to improve their impact.

We also required all grantees to use one common impact reporting system – Views. The collection and reporting of real time output and outcome data was a priority from the start, not least so we could offer remedial support to organisations falling short of their delivery targets, or because we wanted to be able tell a story about the progress and impact the programme was making. Our main aim however, was to help organisations improve their data collection, management and analytical skills so they could deliver better services to their beneficiaries. For some organisations this was successfully achieved and they are now undoubtedly more confident as a result. For some others, where data collection was seen as a burden or just a requirement of funders, or where there were limited skills and capacity to engage with data (as described in point 14), progress was less impressive.

11. Hard-stretched public and voluntary sector bodies barely have the funds for service delivery, leaving nothing for development and testing.

Good philanthropy funds activity that others can't, or choose not to, and this was certainly the case in Realising Ambition. Time, money and energy was invested in crafting logic models, producing manuals and establishing data collection systems. In the private sector, these costs, which are in effect for R&D, would be passed on to the customer. In the current economic environment, the 'customers' for this type of work - local authority commissioners and charitable donors - aren't in the position, or choose not, to pay.

12. In a context of limited resources and high competition, service delivery organisations need the sharpest possible business case.

Many working in the social sector don't engage in developing the sharpest business case for their service. Usually this is because they are not driven by business acumen or because their sole desire is not to grow a successful business, but instead because their focus and priority is on improving the lives of those they work with. Yet unless delivery organisations have well developed cases for their services and a strong plan for sustainability they will at best limp along or more likely face financial difficulty in the longer term, hampering their ability to do good.

We emphasised and provided support in relation to social business modelling and sustainability planning early on and throughout Realising Ambition. Yet as alluded to in point 3, the pressures of set-up, forming relationships with new stakeholders in replication areas and meeting delivery targets meant that too often business model development and sustainability planning were an after-thought (sometimes not until very near to the end of grant funding).

We also produced, for a number of services, a compelling analysis of its cost-benefit or value for money (see Programme Insight 9). This demonstrates clearly the fiscal benefits of investments in prevention and early intervention, particularly important in times of austerity when early intervention and prevention services tend to be less prioritised. In retrospect, we could have undertaken these analyses sooner to encourage and support sustainability planning and to strengthen the development each delivery organisations' business case.

As we suggest in the next section, organisations that 'future-proofed' their replication by using grant funding to subsidise rather than pay for a service out-right, and those that had engagement at very senior level with good experience of the commissioning process were those that dealt most fully with the sustainability question earliest. They also tended, on the whole, to be the most successful from a sustainability perspective.

Commitment from stakeholders in all of the new replication areas funded by Realising Ambition to consider the possibility of continuation once impact could be demonstrated may have enhanced the likelihood of more services being sustained post-grant. This is not something we obliged applicants to demonstrate but in retrospect would have enhanced the potential for sustaining services in each replication area post-funding.

Building confidence in an organisation

Just as a car is useless without a driver (at least until driverless cars are here to stay), so too an activity or service is nothing without a well-led organisation to take it forward. The best evidence-based programme in the world cannot make an impact if the wrong staff have been hired, or no-one knows about the service, or the wrong people are offered help...the list goes on.

In Realising Ambition, we attended to organisational capacity and readiness to replicate as well as focussing in on the specifics of different services. What we learnt won't come as a surprise since these are common experiences in large programmes.

13. Leadership matters.

Delivering programmes with fidelity is hard and often requires different staff behaviours. Similarly introducing new data systems and establishing a culture of reflection and adaptation may represent a major adjustment for many organisations. In common with any change effort, strong leadership is essential, not just within the executive but at all levels of the organisation.

14. Managing stakeholder relationships matters too.

Some delivery organisations were under pressure from local commissioners and stakeholders to bend and flex their services in ways that may have undermined their effectiveness. This was best mitigated by investing time in building and maintaining relationships with both commissioners and other stakeholders. This helped when services

hit challenges, like needing more time to get off the ground or sorting out processes to engage the right beneficiaries in the right numbers (see Kidscape's Positive Assertive Confidence Skills case study). It is also crucial to the sustainability of grant funded services.

15. A useful data system needs staff with the right skills and capacity.

A technically strong management information or data system is useless or draining without an organisational culture that values data and is committed to using it to improve delivery and outcomes. For many providers, particularly smaller organisations or teams without access to a data or performance function within their organisation, there were challenges in building the skills and capacity to analyse, use and disseminate data. Quite simply this is not within the skill sets of many organisations which tend to be focused on delivery. In many cases in Realising Ambition this limited the degree to which organisations used data to reflect on delivery and test adaptations (see Success for All's The Co-operative Primary School case study for how data can inform delivery).

16. Clear processes for quality assurance and data on delivery of core elements helps build the confidence of funders and commissioners in the service by showing continued improvement.

Although the acid test of a service is the impact on outcomes, it can take some time for such data to be available in sufficient quantity to draw reliable conclusions. This would include services that have been slow to get started, those serving small numbers and those with a long duration or expected length of time by which changes in outcomes would be expected. In all of these cases, data on delivery, such as the intensity and frequency of service delivery, the quality of engagement of children and young people and the profile of service users, would provide signals about the quality of implementation. If providers can show that they have used this insight to make adjustments, confidence should be further increased. In Realising Ambition we used this approach to help organisations set milestones for

their service and to make sense of their learning and experience to improve, rather than prove, the services they were replicating (see Shelter's Realising Ambition case study).

17. Planning for sustainability can't start early enough.

One of the core aspirations of the Realising Ambition programme was to catalyse replication and scaling. It was hoped that grant funding plus the confidence inspired by the careful use of data, good documentation and evidence-based approaches would increase the likelihood of attracting funds for continuation, but the context of austerity reducing the availability of funding and a move away from resourcing early intervention and prevention services had an impact. Organisations were actively encouraged to think about how their service would be sustained beyond the grant funding. Whilst this may have been reasonable under ordinary circumstances austerity and public sector cuts have made this very challenging. Most of the organisations are sustaining their services in some form after the grants end, but none have maintained all replication sites (see Programme Insight 7).

The most successful established their services using a subsidy model, where for example, the grant funding was matched by local funds from the start, or grant funding was used to introduce the service to the replication area on the basis that the service would be purchased once outcomes were shown to have improved. This paved the way for successful conversations about funding when the grant ended (see The Malachi Trust's Early Intervention and Family Support Programme and Action for Children's Functional Family Therapy case studies).

Understanding and adapting to new and challenging contexts

All of the organisations in Realising Ambition had to work out how to make a success of their service in a new setting, be that a service that is being implemented for the first time by an organisation (see Extern's Multi Systemic Therapy case study) or a home-grown service being taken to new areas

(see Chance UK's Early Intervention Mentoring case study). This required the ability to understand and where necessary, adapt to the context, and importantly, keep an eye on changes in the context. It also required them to think about whether their replication offered a feasible service in the context of budget cuts, regardless of the effectiveness or quality of what was being offered (see Remedi's Safer Schools Partnership case study).

18. Understanding need is a cornerstone of successful replication.

It is probably fair to say that a good understanding of need should be the starting point for any new service. Furthermore, any new service should be clear about the type of need it is best suited to address. Increasingly this is the expectation of commissioners.

In Realising Ambition, services were concerned with preventing and intervening early in problems that may lead to involvement in the criminal justice system. This meant that they were targeting groups with specific risk factors, such as those exhibiting signs of aggressive or abusive behaviour in the home. It follows then that the delivery organisation would need to estimate the proportion of the population in their catchment area that would meet these criteria – this would be the need and the potential pool of users for their service (see Respect's Young People's Programme case study).

Rarely is a provider organisation in a position to collect new primary data on need. Instead they typically rely on exploiting existing data including local authority needs analysis, data from the public health observatories, other local statistics, and good quality national epidemiological studies. By understanding the profile of need in the community and the capacity of the service, it should be possible to state the extent to which the service will meet this need.

19. Need and demand should not be confused.

It is one thing to determine how many potential beneficiaries there might be in an area, but quite another to work out how many of these might realistically become users of the service.

Across the targeted services in the Realising Ambition programme, organisations faced considerable challenges identifying, engaging and retaining beneficiaries. It proved universally challenging to convert need into demand (see The Be Safe Service's Children's Programme case study). In many cases this was undermined by the effectiveness of referral pathways that relied on other agencies, such as schools, to put forward potential beneficiaries.

Unfortunately, it is not a case of cracking this problem in one area and having a solution for all new areas, since each setting throws up its own peculiarities. The key to meeting need is keeping a watchful eye on reach – the number of beneficiaries who meet the profile for the service who are successfully engaged compared with the expected number of beneficiaries. In most new services, there is a tendency towards optimism believing that there is high demand in a given setting and an ability to easily convert that demand into reach. Unfortunately, it is often a slow uphill struggle to establish a steady pipeline of eligible beneficiaries. Central to nailing this problem is having the data to know if the service is on track and the processes in place to correct the course (see Winston's Wish's SWITCH Programme case study).

20. Successful replication also requires a good understanding of the local service and commissioning landscape.

In the real-world context of local commissioning, logic and evidence are just two of many factors that might be taken into account when it comes to making decisions about new services. Realising Ambition's delivery organisations have found that many commissioners, especially at a time of shrinking budgets, are interested predominantly in price with relatively less awareness or interest in the evidence (see Programme Insight 7).

To counter this, the programme armed organisations with good quality information about their unit costs and a way of relating this to their expected impact on outcomes, thereby shifting the discussion to cost-benefit or value for money

(rather than just lower price). Programme Insight 9 presented compelling evidence of the financial benefits of prevention and early intervention, and provided further support to the old adage that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. That said, commissioners are often under pressure to maintain the services which already are in place locally regardless of how compelling the evidence base for the alternative might be. Subsequently de-commissioning an existing service that can't robustly evidence attributable outcomes to fund a new one rarely happens (see Programme Insight 8).

Developing, sharing and building on learning

In Realising Ambition, we broadly defined successful replication as a tightly defined service delivered well by an organisation that uses evidence to learn and adapt, as required. We have learnt that a good understanding of the context into which a service is being replicated is also important. Replication requires a flexible, iterative approach to the generation and use of evidence in order to adapt, test and refine.

Figure 1: Elements of successful replication

A tightly defined service

A strong organisation

Replicated in suitable context
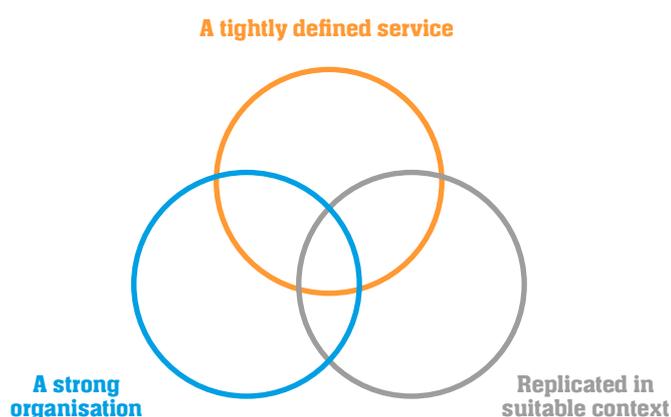
21. Data and evidence should be used to improve, not just prove.

Realising Ambition was a major strategic investment by the Big Lottery Fund. It represented a serious commitment to not only promote effective practice through replication but also

to increase understanding in the field about 'what works'. Funds were earmarked for robust, experimental evaluations of three services in the portfolio, the results of which will be reported later this year. These evaluations will provide important insights about the effect of a mentoring programme, a parenting programme and dating violence programme (see Programme Insight 6). This type of rigorous, independent scrutiny provides a high standard of evidence and thus confidence in whether or not these programmes are likely to have the expected impact.

These studies show that it is possible to undertake pragmatic, robust evaluation of early intervention programmes. We will have a high level of confidence in the findings because of the quality of the evidence and we will have learning to offer to the wider sector.

On the down side, this type of evaluation is expensive (the programme couldn't afford trials for every service), slow (the results will come out after the programme ends) and hard to do well (it put additional burden on the service delivery organisations).

Striving to prove whether or not services have an effect is necessary but it is not sufficient if we are to make more rapid advances in improving children's lives. This is why we emphasised the value of investing in the collecting of data and using data and evidence to improve services and not just to prove them.

The programme's reviewing, monitoring and reporting for all services focused on three areas, to:

- test whether outcomes moved in line with expectations;

- inform where adaptations may be required to maximise impact and fit the local delivery context; and

- form a baseline against which to test such adaptations.

This evidence sought to provide confidence that a service was being delivered as intended, with the expected impact, and to point to ways in which it may be improved.

22. There is value in creating mechanisms to capture learning.

Rather than wait until the end of the Realising Ambition programme to produce a major report, we took a decision early on to practice what we preached. We committed to capture and share learning as the programme progressed in the same spirit of reflection and adaptation that we were promoting with our delivery organisations. The programme insight series, case studies and dedicated website are the tangible outputs of this effort: https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/realising-ambition/. The advantages of regularly producing outputs and sharing our learning included: forcing us to reflect as we went; guiding our own support and delivery offer; more timely information and learning that may well inform the work of others; and not struggling to create one large and exhaustive evaluation output at the end of the programme that would be hard for readers to engage with. On the other hand, particularly in a five-year programme like Realising Ambition, views and conclusions will inevitably shift or nuance over time, as things change and new data are generated. There is also a risk that insights and conclusions are preliminary and shared too early before there is confidence in them. This is the careful balance that must be struck, one that many traditional evaluators may struggle with.

23. There is also value in creating mechanisms to share learning between organisations.

From the inception of the programme, Realising Ambition has tried and tested ways of connecting organisations to aid the easy sharing of learning. While incurring a greater financial cost than digital engagements, most highly valued by projects has been the regular opportunities to meet in-person at regional/national seminars, workshops, peer-to-peer training and Action Learning Sets (see Tavistock Institute for Human Relations evaluation report). We themed events to really focus on key issues: for example whether they be on real-world randomised controlled trials; or evidence-based commissioning. This has fostered peer-to-peer and organisation-to-organisation learning.

Realising Ambition has also always maintained

an outward focus to sharing learning too. Over the course of the programme we have hosted a high-profile annual national event incorporating external speakers, roundtable debates and expert panels. Aside from connecting to other peers, another aspect highly valued by projects was hearing directly from funders and commissioners about the opportunities, realities and challenges faced in the commissioning world.

24. With learning comes a need to be honest not only about success but also failure.

The voluntary sector operates in a climate where success is expected and failure is frowned upon and seldom shared. We tried to challenge this. We believed a willingness to accept, acknowledge and learn from failure was central to a serious engagement with data and evidence.

That said, some organisations struggled at points to replicate their services as intended. Rather than let them fail and learn from this, the consortium put in extensive additional time and resource to support them. We didn't let them fail but we did learn from the fact that they struggled to succeed.

The toughest test of this principle is yet to come. The results of the randomised controlled trials of three projects will give a strong indication of the effect of the services, including if there is no effect. Each of the organisations has been prepared for this outcome, as well as the worst-case scenario: that the services might do harm. We can't predict how the findings will be received, but we would hope that the results are used for learning and improvement and not as a stick with which to beat those organisations brave enough to put themselves into the spotlight.

25. Taking a serious approach to learning and adaptation requires a cultural shift on the part of philanthropy, commissioners, researchers and service delivery organisations.

In many circles, including that of the Big Lottery Fund, there is a growing appreciation and focus on learning and improvement, as opposed to solely

seeking to prove impact and celebrate success (something that we think and hope Realising Ambition has contributed to). Yet as described in these pages, Realising Ambition has also exposed the many barriers that organisations can encounter when they try to take a more logical, data-driven and evidence-based approach to service delivery, replication, adaptation and improvement.

Each stakeholder – funders and commissioners, delivery organisations, beneficiaries and the research community - has a part to play in establishing a culture and incentivising structure that values the continuous improvement of services.

Part 3: Concluding remarks

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Big Lottery Fund for their support and guidance over the course of the programme. The grant of £25 million created a community of 22 organisations, 26 including the managing consortium, and with five years gave the time to focus on delivery, establish relationships and, importantly, learn. The structure of the programme required collaboration not only across the consortium of Catch22, the Dartington Social Research Unit, Young Foundation and Substance, but also across the network of delivery organisations. In an environment where charities typically compete with each other for funds, this, in itself, was a remarkable achievement.

As to the success of the programme, by the usual metrics, it exceeded its goals. It has reached over 161,000 young people against a target of 135,000. Routinely collected data on outcomes from across the programme suggest that young people served are probably better off than they might otherwise have been. For example, for the more intensive early intervention services our analysis suggests that over three-quarters of those served show improvements or stability in outcomes, with the proportion of young people with very high levels of need falling from 54% to 34%. Universal school-based prevention services appear to hold outcomes steady when they might otherwise be expected to deteriorate.

Furthermore, our cost-benefit analysis suggests a strong likely return on investment for evidence-based prevention and early intervention services: cost-benefit ratios range from breaking even right up to a return of £30 for every £1 invested (see Programme Insight 9).

Benefit has also been spread beyond the programme, for example, with an array of tools and resources that have been made freely and widely available. One key resource and legacy product from the Realising Ambition programme is The Confidence Framework: a web-based interactive tool to help sector leaders or individual organisations to reflect upon areas of strength and areas of potential development in order to guide improvement efforts. Figure 2 provides images from the web-site's Rapid and Comprehensive review sections, which you can find at:
https://www.theconfidenceframework.org.uk

Figure 2: The Confidence Framework

As to a broader aspiration, to catalyse replication of programmes that work, we are more circumspect. The charities in the portfolio have been fighting for their very survival as year-on-year the funding environment has become tougher. We have not seen the wide spread scaling that we might have hoped for back in 2011 when Realising Ambition was conceived, but we also didn't envisage the world as it is now. Whilst all of the delivery organisations have future plans to replicate further, the extent of continuation is perhaps not as embedded as we would have hoped for when we embarked on this journey five years ago. Despite this 16 of the services continue to be delivered post-grant in some of the replication areas funded by Realising Ambition or have started to deliver in new replication areas.

Resources we've produced and drawn upon for this issue

This penultimate issue of the Realising Ambition Programme Insight series has summarised some key learning and reflections from the five years of the programme. It has drawn upon learning from each of the previous issues in the series, as well as project case studies, an independent process evaluation from the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations and earlier outputs. You can access all of the Realising Ambition resources and find out more at: https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/realising-ambition/

The final issue will be released later this year, presenting findings from the Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) which are still underway.

Glossary of Terms

Adaptable/adaptation
Those aspects of a service that may be altered, refined or adapted in order to foster greater engagement, retention or satisfaction of those in receipt of a service (yet do not disrupt the underlying core mechanisms of the service or intervention).

Adherence
A dimension of fidelity. Refers to whether the core components of a programme are delivered as designed, to those who are eligible for the service, by appropriately trained staff, with the right protocols, techniques and materials and in the prescribed locations or contexts.

Beneficiary
A person who derives an advantage or benefit as a result of directly receiving a service.

Business case
A business case provides justification for a proposed project or programme. Ideally it includes an analysis of costs and likely benefits, as well as a detailed budget, and also evidence of the need and demand for the service.

Commissioner
Responsible for the strategic allocation of public funds to projects, programmes or services that best address the needs of children, young people and families in their geographical and service area (for example Children's Services, Health, Education, Youth Justice etc). The priorities of commissioners are to engage services that represent good value for money as well as quality delivery and increasing the likelihood of positive impact.

Core components
The key activities that make a service work. Put another way, the specific aspects or mechanisms of a service that lead to the desired change in outcomes. For a service to be replicated successfully, providers need to be clear about what the immutable core the service is.

Cost-avoidance
Refers to actions taken to reduce future costs. Cost-avoidance as a value is the difference between what is actually spent and what would have been spent had no avoidance measures been implemented.

Cost-benefit analysis
The estimation of financial returns on an investment or service. Returns are typically estimated for individual recipients of a service, agencies providing the service and the state. Cost-benefit analyses rely upon accurate cost information and robust evidence of impact (ideally from experimental evaluations). Cost-benefit analysis may produce a calculation of net cost (benefits minus cost) or the ratio of costs and benefits.

Glossary of Terms

- **Data system**

A database that allows projects to view their real time data on outcomes, fidelity monitoring, quality assurance processes and other delivery data such as costs and staffing. High quality systems will typically allow users to view data in a visual format (graphs, charts etc) and enable data to be analysed and presented in a variety of ways (by delivery year, project type, outcome etc). These systems are useful for monitoring children's outcomes as they progress through a programme, monitoring the quality of delivery across multiple sites, and testing the results of adaptations to programme components.

- **Delivery organisation**

The organisation which is responsible for the provision of a service in a replication area which may, or may not, be the developer of the original resources used in the replication of the service in a new area.

- **Delivery targets**

A delivery target clearly sets out exactly what the organisation or commissioner wants to have done and by when. Targets allow delivery organisations to plan, monitor and deliver the specified change.

- **Demand**

In the context of social interventions the number of individuals who (a) match the particular target group within a given population and (b) actually want to participate in the programme.

- **Direct delivery model**

In this replication model the developer is responsible for delivering the venture in a new location. There are no intermediaries for the delivery of the service.

- **Dissemination model**

In this replication model the developer creates resources that enable an independent other to implement the venture in a new location. There is a loose relationship between the originator and the implementer. In some cases a fee may be charged for materials or advice but there is generally no ongoing financial or legal relationship between the two parties.

- **Early intervention**

Intervening in the early stages in the development of difficulties (not necessarily at an early age). Early intervention activities or services seek to stop the escalation of difficulties with the aim of promoting subsequent health and development.

- **Eligible young people**

Those young people who fit the target criteria for a specific service or programme. This could be based upon factors such as their age or gender, or relate to the difficulties they may be experiencing such as homelessness, conduct disorder, or educational problems. Those young people who are eligible for a service or programme should be the same young people who are likely to benefit most from receiving it.

- **Epidemiology**

Epidemiology is the study and analysis of the patterns, causes, and effects of health and disease conditions in defined populations. It is the cornerstone of public health, and shapes policy decisions and evidence-based practice by identifying risk factors and targets for preventive healthcare.

- **Evaluation**

Various aspects of a programme can be evaluated, including the process of delivery, user satisfaction and impact. Here evaluation refers to the use of social research procedures to investigate systematically the effectiveness of programmes or services in terms of improving children's health and development.

- **Evidence**

Generally speaking evidence is information that acts in support of a conclusion, statement or belief. In children's services this tends to be information indicating that the service works, i.e. is achieving the intended change in outcomes. We take a broader view in that evidence may support or challenge other aspects of service delivery, such as quality of implementation, reach and value for money.

- **Evidence-based programmes**

A discrete, organised package of practices or services – often accompanied by implementation manuals, training and technical support – that has been tested through rigorous experimental evaluation, comparing the outcomes of those receiving the service with those who do not, and found to be effective, i.e. it has a clear positive effect on child outcomes. In the Standards of Evidence developed by the Dartington Social Research Unit, used by Project Oracle, NESTA and others, this relates to 'at least Level 3' on the Standards.

Glossary of Terms

■ **Experimental evaluation**
An evaluation that compares the outcomes of children and young people who receive a service to those of a control group of similar children and young people who do not. The control group may   be identified by randomly allocating children and young people who meet the target group criteria – a randomised controlled trial or RCT -, or by identifying a comparable group of children and young people in receipt of similar service – a quasi-experimental design or QED.

■ **Exposure / Dosage**
Refers to the "amount" of programme or service a person receives. This could be the number of total sessions attended, the length of those sessions, or how frequently they took place.

■ **Fidelity / Faithful delivery**
The faithfulness to the original design and core components of a service.
This can be assessed by fidelity monitoring tools, checklists or observations.

■ **Fidelity monitoring tools**
Typically, these are checklists or observations which enable practitioners, programme managers, or researchers to monitor whether or not a programme is being delivered faithfully, according to its original design.

■ **Impact**
The impact (positive or negative) of a programme or service on relevant outcomes (ideally according to one or more robust impact evaluations).

■ **Implementation handbook**
A document that describes the processes and agreements for replicating an intervention in a new context. Typically it would include information on the structure and content of the programme, its intended outcomes and the resources needed to deliver it.

■ **Innovation**
The process of translating a new idea into a service that creates value for the intended beneficiaries and which can be funded or commissioned.

■ **Intervention**
Provision of a service or programme that alters the likely outcomes to be experienced by a beneficiary.

■ **Logic model**
A typically graphical depiction of the logical connections between resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes of a service. Ideally these connections will have some research underpinning them. Some logic models also include assumptions about the way the service will work.

■ **Manual**
A document that covers all the things about a programme or service that are relevant wherever   and whenever it is being implemented. This includes the research base for the programme, the desired outcomes, the logical connection between activities and these outcomes, the target group and all   of the relevant training or delivery materials (see also 'Implementation handbook').

■ **Need**
In relation to services for children and families, this refers to how many individuals in a specified population match the target group for the programme.

■ **Organisation**
An organisation is a group of individuals working together to achieve one or more objectives, oriented towards achieving collective goals. They consist of different function and the functions need to be coordinated

■ **Outcomes**
Outcomes refer to the 'impact' or change that is brought about, such as a change in behaviour or physical or mental health. In Realising Ambition all services seek to improve outcomes associated with a reduced likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system.

■ **Outcomes Framework**
A measurement framework and set of associated tools designed to support delivery organisations to identify and measure the beneficiary outcomes most relevant to their work. The Realising Ambition framework comprises five broad outcome headings: (i) improved engagement with school and learning; (ii) improved behaviour; (iii) improved emotional well-being; (iv) stronger relationships; and (v) stronger communities. Under each of these five headings are a number of specific indicators – 31 in total. Each indicator is accompanied by a short standardised measure that may be completed by children and young people before and after service delivery.

Glossary of Terms

- **Prevention**
Activities or services designed to stop difficulties or possible impairments from happening in the first place.

- **Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT)**
An evaluation that compares the outcomes of children and young people who receive a service to those of a control group of similar children and young people who do not. Within an RCT the control group is identified by randomly allocating children and young people who meet the target group criteria to either the service receipt or control groups.

- **Reach**
The estimated number of the potential beneficiaries it is possible to reach in a specific area through the provision of a service.

- **Reliability**
Reliability is the overall consistency of a measure. A measure is said to have a high reliability if it produces similar results under consistent conditions.

- **Replication**
Delivering a service into new geographical areas or to new or different audiences. Replication is distinct from scaling-up in that replication is just one way of scaling 'wide' – i.e. reaching a greater number of beneficiaries in new places. (See definition of 'scale').

- **Replication model**
The approach to delivering a service into new geographical areas or to new or different audiences.

- **Risk factor**
A risk factor is a characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precedes and is associated with a higher likelihood of problematic outcomes.

- **Routine outcome monitoring**
The routine measurement of all (or a sample) of beneficiary outcomes in order to: (i) test whether outcomes move in line with expectations; (ii) inform where adaptations may be required in order to maximise impact and fit the local delivery context; and (iii) form a baseline against which to test such adaptations.

- **Scale**
A service is 'at scale' when it is available to many, if not most, of the children and families for whom it is intended within a given jurisdiction. Service delivery organisations can scale wide by reaching new places, or scale deep by reaching more people that might benefit in a given place. Replication is one approach to scaling wide.

- **Service**
A group of activities or programmes delivered to group of people to improve their outcomes.

- **Social business model**
How a social venture generates income and creates positive social impact.

- **Social franchising**
Where the owner of an intervention enters into a legal agreement with another person or organisation (the franchisee) which grants that franchisee a licence to use its systems, brand and other intellectual property, and to use those to operate on an identical basis in a particular area. The franchisor teaches the franchisee the entire business format, and provides support via training and communications to the franchisee for the duration of their business relationship. In return for these systems and services, the franchisee pays an initial fee and ongoing fees to the franchisor.

- **Standards of Evidence**
The Standards of Evidence are set of criteria by which to judge how tightly defined and ready for wider replication or implementation a particular service is. They also assess the strength and quality of any experimental evidence underpinning a service. The standards form the basis of the Investing in Children 'what works' portal for commissioners that provides a database of proven services for commissioners of children's services. The Standards have also underpinned numerous others, including the Project Oracle and NESTA Standards of Evidence.

- **Standardised measure**
A questionnaire or assessment tool that has been previously tested and found to be reliable and valid (i.e. consistently measures what it sets out to measure).

- **Subsidy model**
A replication model which uses grant funding to subsidise the cost of delivering a service until such time that it is established and/or demonstrating a positive impact. Commissioners agree to pay for the service in full at an agreed point.

Glossary of Terms

- **Surface adaptations**
Aspects of the service that can be adapted to fit local contexts. These are peripheral components that do not directly alter the core aspects of the service that make it work. Surface adaptations may allow providers in other areas to make the service 'their own' and better serve the needs of local populations.

- **Sustainability**
The ability to maintain or support a service or an activity over the long term.

- **Unit costs**
The cost of everything required to deliver a programme to a participant or a family. A unit cost is normally expressed as an average cost per child or family, but can also be expressed as a range (for example, unit costs ranging for "high need" to "low need" cases).

- **Validity**
In the context of outcome measurement, the degree to which a standardised questionnaire or tool measures what it sets out to measure (i.e. it does not inadvertently measure some related but spurious construct).

- **Value for money**
The optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes. The National Audit Office typically use three criteria to judge value for money: 'economy' (minimising the cost of resources used or required – spending less); 'Efficiency' (the relationship between the output from goods or services and the resources to produce them – spending well); and 'effectiveness' (the relationship between the intended and actual results of public spending – spending wisely).

- **Views**
Views is a project management and outcome reporting platform, designed to demonstrate social impact and value in the context of revised public sector spending priorities and reforms to public sector provision. Its aim is to improve performance management in the delivery of public / children's services and was born out of a desire to develop a scalable approach to process monitoring and outcome measurement so that the richer forms of evaluation and impact assessment could be made available to the widest possible number of delivery organisations.

- **Wholly owned**
Involves a structure in which the organisation creates, owns, and operates the replicated service. This is sometimes referred to as a branch replication model.

Find out more

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