ANNUAL PUBLIC HEALTH CONFERENCE

Thursday 27 & Friday 28 October 2016
Dunblane Hydro Hotel
Community Links: Can the Links Worker Programme deliver sustainable collaborative working between community organisations and primary health care?

Jane Ford, NHS Health Scotland

Based on the report ‘Community Links: Perspectives of community organisations on the Links Worker Programme pilot and on collaborative working with primary health care’

by Mathew Smith and Kathryn Skivington
Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow
Evaluating the Links Worker Programme in ‘Deep End’ general practices in Glasgow

- University of Glasgow commissioned to conduct a 3 year independent evaluation of the Programme
  - outcome and process evaluation to explore its impact on short, medium and longer term outcomes at patient and practice levels
  - final report due March 2017

- This presentation is a sub-project to the main evaluation - additional research to explore the Links Worker Programme from the perspective of community organisations that receive referrals from Community Links Practitioners was funded

- It is expected that the evaluation will contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of Link Workers models in primary care
The Links Worker Programme in Glasgow's ‘Deep-End’

A Scottish Government funded programme which aims:

‘to support people to live well through strengthening connections between community resources and primary care in deprived areas in Scotland’

• Operates within the context of wide health inequalities

• This Links Worker model was developed by Deep-End GPs to support primary care patients with complex needs

• The programme is managed by the ALLIANCE on behalf of the Scottish Government
The existing Links Worker Programme

• Currently being implemented in 7 Deep End practices
• 8 comparison practices also based in areas of deprivation

• Community Links Practitioners (CLPs) employed to:
  • support patients to access community resources with aim of improving health and wellbeing of patients
  • support practices to become more ‘community oriented’
The ‘Community Links’ evaluation aims

• Explore perspectives of those who represent community organisations who receive referrals from CLPs

• Uncover issues relevant to developing intersectoral working between primary and local community resources

• Gain a better understanding of the view of those working in community organisations about this current ‘Links Worker’ model
What did the evaluation tell us – Community Organisation (CO) views

• Programme provides central point of contact or ‘case manager’

• Importance of CLP characteristics:
  • bridge between stakeholders
  • knowledge and understanding means previously ‘hard to reach’ patients now finding routes in to appropriate support
  • valuable knowledge of resources available, local issues, gaps in services etc
  • engage patients with community resources, more than just a referral
What did the evaluation tell us – Community Organisation (CO) views

• CLPs work collaboratively to ensure continued support to individuals with multiple complex needs – time, trust, relationships

• Changing views of GPs to social prescribing? CO’s recognise pressures faced by GPs

• Still face issues in building relations with GP Practices – is practice culture shifting?
What did the evaluation tell us – challenges to collaborative working?

- Austerity: increased demand BUT reduced funding opportunities for COs – impacts on forming relationships, stability of services, CLPs pulling back from services

- Some concerns of inappropriate referrals due to funding cuts in statutory services (e.g. complex mental health issues)

- Crisis vs long term engagement and support – more case management?

- Stronger connections needed city-wide at strategic level?
What did the evaluation tell us – issues raised

- Is the Links Worker programme sustainable:
  - ‘case management’ role – time consuming and complex
  - level of support required by patients to support engagement with services
  - high demand for CLP support – complex needs and crisis situations
  - individual rather than organisational relationships
    - too dependent on individuals – community and the CLP?
    - building relations between community and GP practice?
Final thoughts

• ‘The aim for CLPs to have a community oriented role and support links between GP practice and the community is being achieved to some extent; however, some challenges related to the sustainability of the model remain.’

  • Community organisations largely value case management need that is being fulfilled by CLPs
  • Challenges remain in
    o current funding climate
    o ability to develop lasting links between organisations
    o capacity of CLPs to manage complex cases
What’s next?

The SNP Manifesto commitment (2016)

‘Scotland’s most deprived communities need additional support, so we will recruit at least 250 Community Link Workers to work in GP surgeries and direct people to local services and support.’

• Main evaluation report due in Spring 2017
• Continue to work with Scottish Government to inform current planning around the manifesto commitment

• Audience thoughts and questions?
Acknowledgements

Report authors: Mathew Smith and Kathryn Skivington

Main Evaluation: Principal Investigators: Sally Wyke & Stewart Mercer
Co-investigators: Bridie Fitzpatrick, Mhairi Mackenzie, Alex McConnachie, Kate O'Donnell; Post-Doctoral Research Associate (Qualitative Lead): Nai Rui Chng
Staff: Lesley Grant, John McLeod, Lesley Baird, Andisheh Bakhshi

Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) and the Links Worker Programme staff

Links intervention and comparison practice staff and local community organisation staff

Evaluation commissioned by NHS Health Scotland
To read the full report by Mathew Smith and Kathryn Skivington go to:


Or contact jane.ford3@nhs.net