
EVALUATION OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT FUND – STAGE 2 EMERGING FINDINGS

National Foundation for Educational Research
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Introduction

The Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) was announced in September 1999 and is a three year programme. The programme is aimed at re-engaging disengaged 13 to 19 year olds back into education, training and/or employment. The DfES is providing £60 million over three years to fund over 650 projects located in 40 local authority target areas in England. Three "Managing Agents" deliver NSF through local voluntary and community-based organisations offering a range of activities aimed at attracting disengaged young people.

The DfES commissioned NFER to undertake a study of the NSF to establish the extent to which NSF is supporting the re-engagement of young people in education, training, employment or other structured activities. The results reported here are emerging findings from the study, conducted between July and September 2001, based on a critical review of information and data relating to Year 1 of the Neighbourhood Support Fund. The final report will be published in spring 2002.

Key Findings

- ✦ The NSF has shown that a government programme can reach down into communities by enabling local organisations to respond to the needs of young people and add value to their lives.
- ✦ Projects are recruiting young people from the target group. The majority of young people recruited had some form of educational disadvantage, including low levels of school achievement, being long term non-attenders, truants, or being excluded from school.
- ✦ Other young people frequently involved in NSF projects included clients identified as young offenders or at risk of becoming young offenders, clients who had special educational needs, were homeless, or who were alcohol or drug dependant.
- ✦ Managing Agents identified the skills, attitude, and experience of project workers as the main factors contributing to successful projects. Project activities that have proved to be particularly popular with young people include those associated with the creative arts and leisure- or sports-based activities.
- ✦ Early figures suggest that one third (33 per cent) of young people who had left NSF projects had moved on to education, training or employment with training. Around one in ten had gone on to a local programme, including the Learning Gateway or the New Deal.

Background

The NSF is a programme aimed at re-engaging disengaged 13 to 19 year olds back into education, training and/ or employment. The DfES is providing £60 million over three years to fund over 650 projects located in 40 local authority target areas in England.

The fund's Managing Agents have contracted with voluntary and community based organisations to establish local projects within the 40 areas.

Supported projects give the target group of young people the opportunity to engage in a range of locally delivered activities. Using a variety of professional approaches projects aim to help young people to develop their self-esteem, confidence, skills and knowledge, and in doing so, overcome barriers to participation in mainstream education and training opportunities.

About the research

This study has been commissioned to document and summarise the extent to which the NSF is supporting the re-engagement of young people in education, training, employment and other structured activities. It comprises a series of case studies and an analysis of the NSF database. The study will investigate how the NSF is being received by young people, and identify crucial factors which determine and affect their participation and outcomes.

The results reported here are emerging findings from the study, conducted between July and September 2001, based on a critical review of information and data relating to Year 1 of the Neighbourhood Support Fund.

Project details

- The NSF database contains details of 653 projects, of which 80 per cent were managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), 14 per cent by the National Youth Agency (NYA) and six per cent by the Learning Alliance Charities (Community Service Volunteers, NACRO, Rathbone CI and the YMCA).
- Seventy-one per cent of projects offered

advice, information and counselling to clients. Other common project activities included: job-related skills development; recreational and outdoor pursuits; sport and residential activities; and, individualised learning programmes.

Target groups

- The young people targeted by 80 per cent of projects were those with low levels of school attendance. Other types of young people targeted by large numbers of projects included those who have been excluded from school, long-term non attenders, and young offenders. However, a significant number of projects were intending to target a wide range of disengaged young people.

Recruitment methods

- Overall, one-quarter of clients were recruited onto projects by informal means, including having been told about projects by family or friends, having seen some project publicity, or by self-referral. Other common methods of recruitment were via a project worker (22 per cent) or referral by a teacher/school (11 per cent).

Client characteristics

- Just over three-fifths of clients were male, while around two-fifths were female.
- More than half of clients were aged 13-15 when joining projects, in comparison with 43 per cent who were aged 16 or older.
- Two-thirds (67 per cent) of clients were classified as White, 13 per cent as Black, and 13 per cent as Asian or Chinese.
- The majority of young people recruited had some form of educational disadvantage, including low levels of school achievement, being long-term non-attenders/truants, or being excluded from school. Thus, 54 per cent of clients were categorised as having low levels of school achievement, 27 per cent as being long term non-attenders or truants and 18 per cent as being excluded from school.

- Twenty one per cent of clients were identified as young offenders or at risk of becoming young offenders.
- Around one in five of 13 to 15 year-olds had special educational needs.
- Fifteen per cent of those aged 16 to 19 were homeless.
- Twelve per cent of those aged 16 to 19 were alcohol or drug dependent.

Hard to reach

- Young people who were found to be hardest to reach included those from ethnic minority communities, young mothers, young people aged 17 to 19, young people with learning difficulties who were not in education, training or employment, and isolated young women.

Outcomes

- The Managing Agents considered that the NSF had showed that a government programme could reach down into communities by enabling local organisations to respond to the needs of young people and add value to their lives.
- One third of young people who had left NSF projects had moved on to education, training or employment with training.
- Around one in ten had gone on to a local programme, including the Learning Gateway or the New Deal.
- Around one in ten had left for other reasons, including, for example, for health reasons, entering a custodial sentence, or to support a family.
- While two-fifths of clients aged 13-15 years old* had moved on to education, training or employment with training, only around a quarter of those aged 16 did so.

* The database contains details of the age of clients when joining projects rather than leaving projects. This means that 'employment with training' may, for example, be a legitimate destination for a 15 year old joiner who leaves a project a year later.

- Clients from ethnic minority groups were more likely than White clients to have moved on to education, training, or employment with training.
- There were no marked differences in the outcomes of males and females, although a slightly higher proportion of males had moved on to further learning.
- Young people involved in projects that offered individual learning programmes, and those that spent between one to six months on projects, were most likely to have moved on to further learning.
- Young people with serious personal issues, such as homelessness, mental health problems, and alcohol or drug dependency, were less likely to go on to further learning than other clients.
- Projects reported that some clients had been given the opportunity to accredit their achievements while on projects, using, for example, NVQs, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, or the City and Guilds profile of achievement.
- Projects were also using other ways of measuring soft outcomes, such as improvements in self-esteem or preparedness for work, through the use of daily diaries, discussions, regular reviews, individualised learning plans, and development logs.

Retention of young people

- Managing Agents identified the skills, attitude, and experience of project workers as the main factors contributing to successful projects.
- Project activities that have proved to be particularly popular with young people include those associated with the creative arts and leisure- or sports-based activities.

Links with other services

- Managing Agents reported that projects had established, and were continuing to develop,

links with local agencies, other initiatives including Connexions and Learning Gateway, other NSF projects, and the local community.

Management, evaluation and project support

- All three Managing Agents had implemented the necessary management structures and support systems to coordinate and provide guidance to projects.
- The Managing Agents had also developed comprehensive evaluation frameworks, and were using in-depth, multi-faceted approaches for monitoring and evaluating NSF projects.

Barriers to success

- The main barrier identified by the three Managing Agents related to delays in the start-up of some projects. It was linked with problems in recruiting staff with appropriate experience and skills and, to a lesser extent, recruiting young people onto projects.

Main lessons learned

- There is a need to allocate enough time for project start up, in order to enable projects to recruit the right staff, establish networks, and make contact with, and gain the trust of, young people.
- Consideration should be given to the fact that for some projects the physical proximity of projects was key to ensuring young people's continued engagement in projects.
- Experience indicated that £30,000 was the minimum level of funding to allow projects to appoint a full-time worker and support a significant programme.
- Managing Agents acknowledged the need to allocate sufficient time and resources to providing advice, guidance and support to young people, many of whom had challenging backgrounds.

Future Developments

- The processes of reflective review among the Managing Agents have led them to consider extending the range of activities on offer at project level, and further developing effective ways of recruiting those young people who are the hardest to reach and those with the greatest needs.
- Managing Agents are seeking ways of further refining their approaches to quality assurance and staff development and support.

Copies of this Research Brief (RBX23-01) are available free of charge from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

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