

Forming an alliance to fight child sexual exploitation

Cullagh Warnock (Northern Rock Foundation), Debbie Walmsley (Comic Relief), Rachael Takens-Milne (Trust for London) and Teresa Elwes (The Bromley Trust) discuss the recently established Child Sexual Exploitation Funders' Alliance, focusing on what the Alliance hopes to achieve and why it is using this model of partnership working.

The Child Sexual Exploitation Funders' Alliance (CSEFA) brings together a number of independent funders who are aligning their grant-making to resource an agreed strategy. CSEFA grew out of conversations between funders, including Comic Relief, The Bromley Trust and Northern Rock Foundation, who were already supporting work to address the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). We were keen to take a more strategic approach and to do so in partnership with other funders, many of whom were also already active in this field.

A strategic approach

The Bromley Trust approached leading academic in the CSE field, Professor Jenny Pearce of Bedfordshire University, to develop a coherent and evidenced framework to guide our grant-making. The resulting strategy drew on best practice and research evidence and has the overarching aim of embedding CSE as a key area of statutory safeguarding practice. The strategy has three inter-related strands:

- The rolling out, in three phases, of a hub and spoke model of specialist voluntary-sector-led provision that resources a



© Skypixel | Dreamstime.com

“BBC Children in Need is pleased to play its part in the important initiative created by CSEFA. It offers a unique chance to prove how the positive outcomes for very vulnerable young people can be enhanced and facilitated by funders working together in a creative and analytic collaboration, each working to their own criteria but sharing common cause and applying combined leverage in order to promote systemic change.”

Marc Phillips, Head of Policy and Influencing, BBC Children in Need





total of 16 specialist services, enabling each of them to expand their activities into a number of neighbouring local authority areas. This model is being evaluated by a team at the University of Bedfordshire

- A knowledge hub that brings together learning from the hub and spoke evaluation alongside other research in an accessible resource for the wider sector
- A strand of work that focuses on embedding best practice in the participation of young people, ensuring that their voices are heard in this and other developments in the CSE field.

Aligned funding

In our initial discussions it became clear that an aligned, rather than a pooled, fund would be the best mechanism for funder collaboration in this instance because we wanted to:

- Include as many interested funders as possible and were aware that different funders would want to focus on different aspects e.g. service provision, evaluation and learning, young people's participation
- Create a partnership that would work both for funders working at a local level and those with a national remit
- Be able to move quite quickly as everyone involved felt a sense of urgency in terms of the issue
- Be flexible enough in how we worked together that any independent funder, large or small, could get involved.

What this means in practice is that each funder takes CSEFA-related applications through its own process. Potentially suitable projects are identified by the wider group but have to meet individual

“The CSEFA has enabled The Blagrave Trust to have confidence in the initiatives we are funding, in this self-evidently important area of work, through tapping into the shared expertise of the group. As important, however, is that through a shared strategy that includes a rigorous process of evaluation and the participation of young people themselves along with the buy-in of key stakeholders, there is a real opportunity to influence learning across national policy and practice.”

Jo Wells, Director, The Blagrave Trust

“As a funder working across a distinct geographical area, Northern Rock Foundation is always interested in scaling-up best practice and meeting gaps in provision. By joining with colleagues to fund a coherent strategy we hope to see a really significant increase in good quality services. The aligned funding structure is enabling us to move relatively quickly and take advantage of the high public policy profile this issue currently has.”

Cullagh Warnock, Programme Manager, Northern Rock Foundation

funders' criteria. Smaller clusters of funders share information and work closely when considering applications to fund different elements of the same project. All of us are keen to ensure that applicants should not be presented with additional hurdles because they are applying for CSEFA-related funding.

Governance

All those involved with CSEFA are invited to attend a bi-monthly

meeting and are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out some basic parameters for our shared activities, including how to join and how to leave, communications and evaluation plans. A smaller steering group shares basic administration tasks including setting and documenting meetings and co-ordinating activities. All CSEFA members use a private community on the

shared experience

Ariadne Portal (an online shared community for grant-makers) to share documents and other information, in an attempt to prevent too many group emails flying around.

Sharing the learning

CSEFA does not intend to take a lead in institutional advocacy on the issue of CSE – the field already benefits from many excellent advocates, some of whom are involved in work being funded by CSEFA members. However, we are keen that learning from the work is shared widely and have established an Expert Reference Group with senior representatives from key statutory and voluntary sector agencies. The Group is chaired by Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children's Commissioner for England, and will help ensure that learning from the CSEFA strategy is embedded in future policy development and commissioning priorities.

Evaluation of CSEFA

We are also keen to learn from this experiment in funder collaboration and have asked the Institute of Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) to undertake an independent evaluation of CSEFA. IVAR researchers have been speaking to those involved from the early stages and are sharing findings in a timely fashion so we can learn as we go.

IVAR's report on the scoping phase of the Alliance says: "Our initial impressions of the Alliance suggest that it is a powerful combination of experienced individuals, money and ideas, bound together by a working culture that is characterised by a generosity of spirit and a shared commitment to achieving meaningful change. These features create

the foundations for a successful collaboration. However, all those involved are well aware that they cannot afford to be complacent."

Interested in hearing more?

We are planning a joint Issue Based Network (IBN) event (between the Children and Young People IBN

and the Violence against Women and Girls IBN) to discuss progress and share learning, in Autumn 2014. Watch the ACF website www.acf.org.uk for further details. In the meantime if you are interested in joining CSEFA we are open to new members, so please get in touch and we can let you have more information. ■

"This Alliance is issue-focused, pragmatic and can do. We share information, listen and learn from one another, providing constructive challenge with the sole purpose of making the best grants possible. I hope other funders will join us and get involved, as we will be richer from your participation."

Nicola Thurbon, Head of Policy and Learning England Directorate, Big Lottery Fund

"Comic Relief has been funding in this area for many years now, seeing a gradual increase in awareness, interest and commitment to tackling it: at government and local levels; in the statutory and voluntary sectors; and indeed society at large. It really feels as if the time is right for facilitating a step-change towards the time when any sexually exploited young person, wherever they are in the country, will be identified and get the help they need. I am finding it exciting working with such a variety of other funders through CSEFA to contribute to this end. People are committed and everyone has resources and skills to contribute. I believe we will really achieve something positive together through this work."

Debbie Walmsley, UK Programme Manager, Comic Relief