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Evaluation of the effects of Child Poverty Solutions Wales

Research Summary

Social research

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Child Poverty Solutions Wales is hosted by Save the Children with support from the Welsh Government. It is tasked with supporting public authorities in Wales to tackle child poverty. Arad Research was commissioned to carry out an evaluation of the effects of the Child Poverty Solutions Wales Project since 2010. This summary presents the findings of the evaluation.

Findings:

- Child Poverty Solutions Wales (the Project) met its goals and offered support to all Welsh authorities. Support was provided through individual meetings, advice on the telephone and email, materials provided directly and on the Project's website, and through training and events.
- Consultees were unanimous in their praise for the nature, pitch and approachability of the support service. The support enabled them to better understand child poverty, to make a case to sceptical colleagues, to save time in sourcing material for their child poverty strategies and to establish new working relationships. This led to the production of child poverty strategies by more authorities and for those strategies to have considered the implications of tackling child poverty in more detail.
- The challenge in maintaining a focus on child poverty in the face of budget pressures and in the face of policy and organisational changes remains. Authorities reported that there is still a need for child poverty-focused support.

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Analysis for Policy

The evaluation approach

The evaluation was undertaken as the Project's contract period was coming to an end. It was based on a combination of a desk-based review of authorities' child poverty strategies and interviews with the Project co-ordinator, the Welsh authorities and partner organisations.

Findings

Nature of the support

Support was provided to enable public authorities to gather data, conduct needs assessments, set priorities and ultimately produce child poverty strategies. This was provided through:

- direct support to Welsh authorities through face-to-face, telephone and email contact, training and events, and
- a Project website with text and video defining child poverty, policy guidance and a library of evidence.

Interviewees generally believed that the support programme was very effective and well delivered. The authorities were not able to draw on other support. In particular, they valued **contact with a single named individual**, and especially his role in challenging and promoting new ways of thinking about child poverty. The **website** was well received although some issues were raised, namely that the site is not always kept up-to-date, had missing links, and did not contain copies or links to the completed strategies. The **events** were an important part of the support programme, especially as they fostered

good networking and the sharing of ideas. The feedback on the **training** delivered to over 570 participants during 2010-2012 was positive.

Overview of Outcomes

Interviews revealed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the support, and this has translated into the following outputs and outcomes:

Support in making the case to

colleagues: Individuals charged with preparing child poverty strategies had to make the case internally within each authority. The input of the Project was of practical use in helping authorities' staff make the link between child poverty and the authorities' work.

Support in drafting child poverty

strategies: Correspondence regarding the draft strategies took place mainly by email and telephone and in some cases extended to comments on several drafts. Feedback on early draft versions provided the authorities with the confidence and additional information needed to continue towards producing a final version.

Better understanding of child poverty:

Interviewees outlined that they have been encouraged to think about, and engage with, further research on the topic of child poverty. The Project has resulted in greater awareness of child poverty. A

wider range of staff members are now involved in the internal discussions about child poverty.

More strategies produced which were more robust: In two instances authorities were encouraged to produce strategies that they may not have done otherwise. Several interviewees noted that their strategies were 'better thought through' and more relevant and robust due to the involvement of Child Poverty Solutions.

Establishing new partnerships and new ways of working: The events and the contacts made through the Project have brought about new partnerships. These links haven't been confined to those directly related to tackling child poverty but have spilled over to other aspects of service delivery.

Saved the authorities' time: It was argued that far more time would otherwise have been spent by authority staff in preparing the strategies and searching for materials themselves.

Not all authorities had changed course because of Child Poverty Solutions however, and a couple of authorities were confident in their knowledge of the subject and did not feel the need to draw fully on the support of the Project.

Examples of further impacts were revealed during the fieldwork such as new activities,

a more systematic engagement of disadvantaged groups and child poverty featuring more often on agendas. Although linked to the work of the Project, these activities are however in large part due to the Measure and the obligation placed upon authorities to prepare a Child Poverty Strategy and not the existence of focused support.

Future needs

The overwhelming message from the authorities is that there is still a need for child poverty-focused support since many challenges remain, such as making the case to colleagues or sourcing evidence. The work of putting authorities in touch with other projects and providing resources continues on an ongoing basis, as does updating the website. The main support needs for the future will be guidance on monitoring and evaluating; dealing with budget cuts; reacting to changes in organisations' governance changes to the policy landscape and briefing new staff.

Value for Money

The available data and the nature of the Project only allows a limited study of value for money, however Child Poverty Solutions has clearly been effective in meeting all objectives set, and the support met the needs of the Welsh authorities.

The administration structure was appropriate, and the high level of

satisfaction with the support provided has translated into outcomes.

Conclusions

Critical Success Factors

The model of having a dedicated body responsible for promoting and supporting the development of child poverty strategies is widely appreciated and valued. Critical to its success that the Project had a simple premise and a clear consistent message, it provided encouragement and customised support, and was separate from Government. Interviewees were of the opinion that they would not get the same depth of understanding from Government officials.

However, some concerns were raised by a minority of stakeholders about aspects of the delivery. Some of these concerns were that the website was not fully maintained, that the Project lacked a detailed understanding of the authorities; the support was Cardiff-centric and did not have due regard to the Welsh language and that there were missed opportunities for the greater involvement of the authorities.

Meeting Goals

The Project achieved the goals it was tasked with:

Goal 1: Extend and develop its current work, through a dedicated project co-ordinator - A co-ordinator was in post from the Project's start in April 2010.

Offers of support were extended to all public authorities.

Goal 2: Maintain and enhance the existing website resource - A new website was launched in November 2011. The website is trusted, wide-ranging and visually appealing. However, several public authorities reported a low use of the site and there were minor complaints of material not appearing on the site and of missing links.

Goals 3 and 4: Provide support to Welsh authorities in meeting their duties and to raise awareness of their responsibilities for addressing child poverty - The support was valued by those individuals tasked with preparing child poverty strategies. Individual meetings were an opportunity to discuss specific aspects in depth while the events were seen by many as the most important aspect of the project and a valued opportunity to network.

Goal 5: Promote Child Poverty Solutions Wales to new audiences - The Project established itself as a trusted source of information and support for Welsh authorities and this was a platform to link with other areas such as education and health. Training has been delivered during specific health sector events and links made with other sectors.

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