



# **Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families**

## **Department for Children, Schools and Families**

### **A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)**

**June 2008**

#### **Introduction**

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041.

## Key comments

1. NCVYS welcomes the opportunity to comment on *Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families*<sup>1</sup> and the policy, and practice, focus that it puts on the health and wellbeing of young people.
2. Although the DCSF document is useful, NCVYS would welcome much clearer guidance for local children's trusts to ensure that rhetoric translates into effective practice.
3. The guidance highlights integrated working and the importance of partnerships. In order to develop good practice and effectively engage the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS) in children's trusts, central and local government should use VCYS infrastructure organisations to facilitate relationships and disseminate information to the sector. This can help partners understand the roles that they have to play in children's trusts and reach small voluntary organisations who provide vital services to young people, especially those hardest to reach.
4. NCVYS recognises that there is an onus on the VCYS to proactively engage with children's trusts and has been part of the Community Sector Partnership for Children and Young People which has produced the *talking trusts* resources to facilitate this (see 10.). Such resources need to be recognised and supported by government in order develop communication and understanding between sectors. Resources produced by the VCYS might also be more likely than government publications to reach small voluntary organisations who are vital service deliverers and able to represent often the most hard to reach young people.
5. Commissioners of services need to understand those that they are commissioning, in particular the VCYS, and be creative in their decision-making in order to engage small voluntary organisations. Children's trusts should also promote grant-based funding to support the VCYS, again particularly the smaller organisations.
6. Although NCVYS welcomes the focus on engaging health bodies in children's trusts, the outcomes for individual young people are not clear. NCVYS supports a pathway approach focused around the needs of each child or young person as they navigate their way through the system.

### **Does this guidance help to facilitate the step change and cultural transformation necessary to deliver the ambitions set out in *The Children's Plan*<sup>2</sup>?**

7. The guidance expands on the ambitions set out in *The Children's Plan* that describe how children's trusts are 'to drive collaboration' and 'concert local action in the interests of better outcomes for children and young people, recognising that no one agency or interest can do that alone' (DCSF 2007:146-147). The focus on collaboration, integrated working and joint commissioning all

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<sup>1</sup> DCSF (2008) *Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families* is available at the time of writing via: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1544>

<sup>2</sup> DCSF (2007) *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures* is available via: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/>

point in the direction of a step change and cultural transformation, however the problem will be transferring a national policy into consistent good practice at a local level.

8. Children's trusts involve many agencies, including relevant partners and 'other agencies', e.g. the VCYS. To ensure that a step change occurs, all agencies involved need to be fully engaged, consulted and informed of developments. Agencies need to understand each other's ways of working and be aware of the different challenges that each face. Voluntary infrastructure organisations, such as a local Council for Voluntary Youth Services (CVYS), can provide vital links between Local Authorities (LAs) and the VCYS by disseminating information and reaching small, local voluntary organisations.

**Recommendation 1: Government to work with voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations to facilitate understanding and disseminate information between the sectors.**

**Does this guidance help engage other partners not under a duty to cooperate, including those in the private, voluntary and community sector?**

9. Apart from passing references to the VCYS, the guidance has two paragraphs dedicated to the third and private sectors (3.37-3.38). In order to encourage the engagement of the VCYS, children's trusts need to show that they understand the sector and encourage LAs to develop their knowledge and relationships locally.
10. It is also the responsibility of the VCYS to engage with LAs and children's trusts. To this end the Community Sector Partnership for Children and Young People (2006) produced two documents<sup>3</sup>. The first, *talking trusts*, is aimed at statutory agencies and sets out straightforward recommendations encouraging children's trusts to do more to engage with voluntary and community sector partners, especially small organisations who are doing critical work with children or young people on the ground. The second, *Community Involvement in Children's Trusts – Unlock your potential*, is a counterpart document offering guidance for community and voluntary organisations delivering services to children or young people on how to engage effectively with children's trusts.

**Recommendation 2: Government should utilise and support the development of resources produced by the VCYS in order to engage other partners who are not under a duty to cooperate with children's trusts, in particular small VCYS organisations.**

11. Proposals and measures within the guidance may help engage the VCYS. For example, the forthcoming Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (CfEO)<sup>4</sup> is an opportunity to engage all sectors in the development of services for children and young people. NCVYS welcomes the focus on young people as one of the six work themes of the CfEO and hopes to see a positive culture shift and practice development, thereby improving services for young people.

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<sup>3</sup> The *talking trusts* publications are available to download via:  
<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=342>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/cfeo/>

## **Does the guidance assist in supporting further improvement in levels of joint commissioning?**

12. The guidance encourages children's trusts partners to 'pursue commissioning activities jointly and pool budgets wherever possible to shape local services to meet the needs of children and families' (DCSF, 2008:17). This does promote further improvement in levels of joint commissioning but it is essential that commissioners fully understand those that they are commissioning and be creative in their decision-making to ensure that services reach marginalised young people.
13. In order to enable small voluntary organisations to be successfully commissioned, a balanced approach needs to be taken between commissioners and service providers.
14. Children's trusts should champion a grant-based approach to funding which is essential in supporting small voluntary organisations who often work with the most disadvantaged young people.

**Recommendation 3: Children's trusts should champion a grant-based approach to funding to support small voluntary organisations.**

## **Does the guidance promote effective engagement of health bodies within the children's trust, including pooling of resources and budgets?**

15. NCVYS welcomes the measures proposed in the guidance and find them useful. However, it is not clear about how they will really make a difference to improving the health of individual children and young people. NCVYS is concerned that much is left to good will locally rather than clear structures and accountability.
16. NCVYS would like to see a pathway approach that is focussed around the individual needs of each child or young person as they navigate their way through the system.

**Recommendation 4: Children's trusts should ensure that a child-centred pathway approach is adopted to fulfil the needs of children and young people as they navigate their way through the system.**

## **Does the guidance help clarify inter-agency governance arrangements, e.g. the relationship between the children's trust and the Local Strategic Partnership?**

17. NCVYS welcomes the recognition that governance arrangements are not working as effectively as they could at the moment. For example VCYS organisations can encounter difficulties in engaging with multiple local structures.
18. VCS engagement with children's trusts can often be facilitated by local voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations. Research has shown that membership of VCS networks raises the likelihood of an organisation's involvement in Local Authority (LA) planning:

44% of organisations that are not a member of a network have had no involvement compared with 21% of those that are a member of a network. Organisations that are members of networks also tend to be involved across more areas of planning than non-members

(Strategy Complete Ltd, 2007<sup>5</sup>)

19. Furthermore, VCS representation on children's trust is often fulfilled by the local CVYS. VCS Engage research into the development of Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs) highlighted that 'VCS networks had all developed processes to ensure that representation on the various children's partnership bodies was effective and accountable to the network members' (Wade, 2007<sup>6</sup>).
20. Children's trusts need to be more transparent to facilitate VCYS engagement, especially with small voluntary organisations. Measures should be introduced such as an obligation to publish children's trusts board members. This will enable VCYS organisations to easily identify points of contact and facilitate communication and engagement.

**Recommendation 5: Children's trusts should be clear and transparent to facilitate the engagement of the VCYS. For example there should be an obligation to publish children's trusts board members.**

#### Summary of recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** Government to work with voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations to facilitate understanding and disseminate information between the sectors.

**Recommendation 2:** Government should utilise and support the development of resources produced by the VCYS in order to engage other partners who are not under a duty to cooperate with children's trusts, in particular small VCYS organisations.

**Recommendation 3:** Children's trusts should champion a grant-based approach to funding to support small voluntary organisations.

**Recommendation 4:** Children's trusts should ensure that a child-centred pathway approach is adopted to fulfil the needs of children and young people as they navigate their way through the system.

**Recommendation 5:** Children's trusts should be clear and transparent to facilitate the engagement of the VCYS. For example there should be an obligation to publish children's trusts board members.

The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services  
3rd Floor, Lancaster House, 33 Islington High St, London, N1 9LH  
T: 020 7278 1041 F: 020 7833 2491 W: [www.ncvys.org.uk](http://www.ncvys.org.uk)  
Registered charity no. 1093386  
Registered company no. 4385383

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<sup>5</sup> Strategy Complete Ltd (2007 unpub) *The Additional VCS Capacity Building Needs Following Implementation of Youth Matters*.

<sup>6</sup> Wade, S. (2007) *VCS engagement in the development of Children and Young People's Plans 2006/7: current status and good practice*. London, VCS Engage.