

Draft Review Report for Sub 21 Northumberland

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Introduction

Over the last 12 months, a multi-agency team has been developing relationships with other agencies and service providers in order to provide a range of extra-curricular activities for young people, with the aim of reducing alcohol use and related anti-social behaviour in Ashington, Northumberland. Existing services, and newly developed activities, have been packaged under the brand of Sub 21 and partners have been working together drawing in funding from a variety of sources.

The key partners (steering group) comprise:

- Northumberland Drug and Alcohol Team
- Positive Futures
- Community Safety
- Bad Apples (a community interest co-operative)

This report presents a review of the last 12 months of the pilot scheme. The report also includes recommendations for future evaluation of Sub 21.

Review methodology

We conducted a retrospective review of the Sub 21 pilot programme in Ashington. In agreement with the funders, the research themes we concentrated on included:

- The processes involved in developing and delivering such an approach
- Facilitators and barriers to effective practice
- Benefits and challenges of partnership working
- Establishing the outcomes generated (such as changes in attitudes to alcohol use, and behaviour, gaining skills) for young people as a result of participation.

We collected data to inform the review by means of:

- Individual interviews with steering group members (4)
- Interviews with a range of young people participating in Sub 21 (7)
- Individual interviews with key staff representing the partners and service providers (10)

The interviews were conducted following guidance from members of the steering group, and lasted between 15 minutes and an hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analyses. Key themes were then identified from the interviews and are presented here.

The context

Sub 21 has developed against a backdrop of a change in Local Authority structure and severe funding cuts. While this could have posed a problem for establishing a 'new' initiative, the steering group saw these changes as offering new opportunities to work together to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency to tackle alcohol and disorder among young people in Northumberland. Before 2009, multiple funding streams and initiatives meant that people were working on their own projects and there was little oversight and coherence to the strategy to deal with drug and alcohol misuse:

To about 2009 there was a lot of stuff going on and it was very blurred. Everybody knew antisocial behaviour and alcohol was linked, everybody knew the police dealt with bits, you had ASB units, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, but it was quite fragmented. (steering group member)

Young people in Ashington were causing a particular problem, with particular areas known to be populated by underage drinkers, and there had been a recent spike in offending behaviour linked to alcohol. Members of the steering group and interested partners attended a presentation in the neighbouring authority of North Tyneside, which was running a Sub 21 programme across Wallsend, based on a social marketing approach, working with retailers, ensuring the participation of young people, and providing a universal offer of diversionary out of and after-school activities for young people in the area.

Sub 21 was seen as a way to bring together a co-ordinated response to alcohol misuse under one banner, incorporating some of the work already going on, and providing a link between statutory, private and voluntary agencies. Nevertheless, several challenges presented themselves. One key challenge was the dispersed nature of such a rural county as Northumberland. It was quickly decided that a pilot could not cover the whole County, and so Ashington was chosen for several reasons. Ashington has traditionally suffered with high levels of social and economic deprivation (NCC 2010). In addition, it was felt that former service delivery was very insular:

It attracted a lot of money, and that attracted insular attitudes, and you had to be in a particular group, and you had to be cliquy with everybody else so you didn't get a piece of the pie. (steering group member)

It was also decided to target particular young people known to be drinking on the streets by using the police to refer in to Sub 21 activities when they issued a first letter under section 30 to these young people. This was primarily a resourcing issue:

I mean we have had to because we haven't got the funding. It would be great if we could run it like North Tyneside and just open it up, the provision, to anybody who wants to take it up and go through the schools and offer it to every child in the school but we haven't got the funding to do it at the moment so we have to target it to where it is going to make the most difference. (steering group member)

A review of the pilot was carried out between January and March 2012. We now turn to examine the findings of the review.

Key review findings

The findings from the review identify the key successes, challenges and learning points from the first year of operation (2011-2012) of the Sub 21 Northumberland pilot. They are presented thematically, in turn.

Diversity of funding

One of the inefficiencies perceived with the situation pre 2009, is that although there was 'plenty' of money around to fund intervention work, this was often delivered as a series of discrete time-limited projects that were unsustainable in the long-term. Future success was deemed to be reliant on multiple sources of funding and not being reliant on a single source. Sub 21 has taken its lessons in this regard from other Local Authorities who had managed to sustain their services:

Some of the Local Authorities, you know, you had your manager who sort of sat there and would bring money in and deliver that and when it finished you would go onto the next one and the next one and the next one, and the more successful ones were feeding the existing projects and they were adding sort of additional work so they

were contributing more, so the good ones would bring in money so when one funding stream finished another one was already there. (steering group member)

Sub 21 Northumberland has been proactive in drawing in a diversity of funding to sustain the activities, including from the Home Office and local charities. Resources in kind have also been used, such as a venue at the local YMCA that hosts a drop in, and an office for one of the Sub 21 steering group members.

Working with others

Effective partnership working depends on developing good relationships with others, having good communication, understanding what each other is doing and shared agendas and goals.

It generally needs the 'open door attitude' (steering group member)

Good communication is crucial to ensuring that partners feel part of what Sub 21 is trying to achieve, and that its focus and aims align with their own. By sharing this understanding, partners are more likely to want to work together to the benefit of the young people and the communities they live in. There seems to be a good understanding of the need for this existing among the Sub 21 leaders who are keen to draw in other agencies and services, and are experienced in meeting the challenges that this brings:

I had a rant, and you had a rant back and then we just went 'oh, we are actually singing from the same hymn sheet here' and 'we both want the same things'... so sometimes you actually need to speak to the people involved to get what they want out of it as well. (steering group member)

Although Sub 21 is led by the steering group, it is not 'owned' by any particular organisation or agency:

The programme isn't actually owned by anybody... it's the first time that we have tried that really where it is quite fuzzy. (steering group member)

This has benefits, in terms of being able to use different budgets, and being able to respond to the needs of diverse partners, but it also comes with risks. Previous evidence from similar programmes indicates that schemes such as this need a strong infrastructure and committed people in strategic and operational positions to continue to drive it, maintain its focus, and

develop according to need. There is a risk that turnover of staff due to cuts can destabilise the delivery and development of such a project, particularly at a strategic level.

Targeting the right young people

Sub 21 currently works by offering targeted services to identified young people who are referred into it. The main route for this is via a Section 30 order served by the police. Section 30 orders consist of a system of 3 letters. If a young person is picked up by police on the streets for an alcohol related incident, a letter will be sent home and they are referred into Sub 21 for diversionary activities and further work around their lifestyles. If young people are picked up a second time, this triggers a second letter and a referral to the Youth Offending Service (YOS). If young people are picked up a third time (and few young people are), this can trigger court action and sanctions being applied. Having Sub 21 as an early intervention in this process is intended to prevent escalation to the second or third stages. Sub 21 activities can also be offered as part of individual YOS or Children's Services action plans. Being linked to the Section 30 data for referrals is seen as key to targeting the right young people:

You just know who you are targeting and why. It's really useful... It's not just a case of getting a report of kids hanging around on the street drinking and it's someone's perception that they are drinking or being antisocial, it's actually you know it's been serious enough that they have been stopped and warned and had the alcohol confiscated. So you know you are actually tackling the ones that are drinking on the streets and being antisocial. (steering group member)

Messages about alcohol

All activities under the Sub 21 work strand are clear and consistent on the stance they take in regard to alcohol. Young people know that they are not able to attend activities if they are drunk or bring drink with them.

We have a breathalyser on the front door and if you turn up hammered you don't get in and you don't get in to the next one either... some people might see that as harsh but it instils rules and discipline. (steering group member)

More subtle work occurs during activity sessions and drop ins where workers can reinforce healthy lifestyles, and provide information about the effects of alcohol:

We do a lot of discussions on alcohol and we've got like leaflets around about alcohol and drug use and stuff like that... we will get some big bits of paper like this and someone will sellotape it up and someone will sort of draw... one of the young people will draw around somebody and like it's more interactive, and discuss the physical effects alcohol has on the body like tremors and stuff like that... (youth worker)

The work is often integrated into the activities young people participate in:

We have done like a DJ and MC workshop... based around it as well where we will get them [young people] to write down say 20 different drugs and what they think the effects are and stuff like that and then we will get them to write lyrics around it and they don't even realise what they are doing... (youth worker)

Consultation with young people

In order to provide a service that is relevant and acceptable to young people, consulting them on service development is usually a productive exercise. Sub 21 has demonstrated a commitment to youth participation. According to staff, young people are regularly consulted about the activities they would like to see, both formally (e.g. surveys) and informally (during sessions):

It's focused by the young people and it's because without them we would fail straight away and it works both ways because they get what they want and we are getting something out of it as well so everyone is a winner (service provider)

Working with local traders

Sub 21 Northumberland had hoped to be able to involve local traders in working to reduce street drinking and antisocial behaviour. Work with the traders in the area has not been developed as much as was hoped, although the police have led several very successful prosecutions. This may be partly due to the focus that the pilot has had on young people and providing the diversionary activities:

Even on the trader side we haven't developed that side of it as well as would might have been liked. The focus has been more on the kids and the diversion. (steering group member)

Nevertheless, the youth workers gain information from young people about where they obtain their alcohol from, and can pass on any such intelligence to the police to act upon.

Sub 21 can continue to have a role to play in maintaining good relationships with the Police and ensuring that they are continuing to treat the reduction of street drinking and sales of alcohol to underage people as a priority in Ashington.

The benefits of Sub 21

The police have identified a reduction in drinking on the streets and associated disorder in recent months, according to members of the steering group, and the youth workers. Those associated with Sub 21 are firm in the belief that this reduction is, at least in part, attributable to Sub 21, as they see the young people they are working with start to modify their behaviour:

Even from a year ago when I first started in there, especially on a Friday night, drinking was a big issues and you would get a lot in that were half cut, but now it's just the odd one every two or three weeks. (youth worker)

There is less people on the streets now than what there was. (steering group member)

I can think of at least a dozen lads when we first started doing Sub 21 who would come in at the start drinking and we have had them coming in off their face and that... we have had them lying on the toilet floor and stuff as well.. and... I can probably count on one hand in the last year the amount of times we have had to deal with people coming in drunk and that is because they know obviously that is not allowed to happen and it's probably a little bit to do with the education that is going on and discussions that we have around Sub 21. (youth worker)

The views of young people

The young people, on the whole, enjoyed the activities they took part in, especially the trips:

Because it's better than sitting on the streets isn't it... getting wrecked every day...? (boy, 16)

The young people told us that they preferred to attend the Sub 21 drop in, as it gave them something to do, and it also meant that they weren't drinking or taking drugs that evening:

We come here to keep us occupied. Occupied and it keeps his [referring to another boy in the room] addiction to...to a lower level. (Boy, 16)

Young people enjoyed spending time with their friends, but also meeting new people. Some of the girls felt that activities could be more focused towards them, as they felt many activities (such as pool, console games, football) were oriented towards boys:

They have more stuff for the lads than the lasses we've only got this nail varnish stuff there, they've got Fifa and pool and everything we hardly have. (girl, 14)

One girl, who had reduced her drinking since attending Sub 21 told us about what she used to do before attending:

I never used to think there was any harm... on a sensible day I don't think like when we didn't used to have fires and stuff... when it was just the girls I never thought it would be any harm because we never were stupid we used to just sit there. We used to play drinking games and we used to just talk amongst ourselves but then the lads would get too carried away and set fires. (girl, 13)

She now acknowledges that she was vulnerable, and that she does not participate in these group drinking sessions any more.

Another girl whose parents grounded her after receiving the first letter from the police under section 30 stated:

I haven't touched alcohol in a very long time. (girl, 14)

Young people felt that the staff were an important part of creating a welcoming, positive atmosphere in the sessions. They appreciated it when staff got involved with what they were doing, and showed interest in them.

Disaggregating impact

With a project such as this it is often difficult to attribute outcomes, when there is such a variety of work being carried out. Other things happening in the area are likely to have had an impact upon the levels of street drinking and antisocial behaviour. The change of the local High School into an academy has seen an improvement in behaviour among its pupils which, according to the steering group, could be put down to changes in exclusion policies

and a zero tolerance approach to misbehaviour. The provision of letters to parents by the use of Section 30 powers by the police may also have contributed to a reduction in levels. Indeed, one girl we spoke to attributed her reduction in drinking alcohol to the fact that she had been 'grounded' by her parents as a result of the letter.

We can't say for definite it was just because of Sub 21... some of those would have tailed off anyway (Section 30 orders), but certainly from a police point of view it's fantastic to be able to offer them something rather than just hit them with a big stick. (steering group member)

Nevertheless, finding evidence that young people enjoy the Sub 21 activities and hearing stories from them about how it prevents them from drinking provides a strong case that Sub 21 has been contributing, and has the future potential to contribute, to lower levels of disorder. Coupled with the reduction in other services, such as youth work provision, extended services, Parent Initiative and schools sports partnerships, the role of Sub 21 could be seen to be filling a gap for early intervention. This would seem to be particularly important in the light of the increase in referrals to Children's Services due to a lack of capacity in early intervention services.

Implications for roll out

Sub 21 in Ashington took place in a tightly defined geographical area and thus with a limited set of partners and projects running alongside it. Northumberland is a large County, made up of towns and large rural areas that are some distance apart. The numbers of young people involved in alcohol misuse and disorder are spread geographically, meaning that numbers in hotspots aren't high enough to put on activities in local areas. In addition, young people often will not travel to other areas to take part in activities. This means that targeting is likely to be more difficult outside the major conurbations. One way to address this would be to build upon the universal provision already available locally. This may necessitate involving schools as partners, as schools are often the main providers in more rural locations. There will be a need to be aware of systems that are already working well in these areas (e.g. those provided under extended services, or by the youth services) and a need to be flexible in approach to ensure that partners buy in to the approach of Sub 21. There may be concerns about negative connotations of targeting or 'rewards for the bad kids' or that their identity will be diluted. By considering a more universal approach in more outlying areas, some pooling of budgets may be possible. Within this approach, further work would need to be done to identify how best to target particular young people involved in alcohol misuse and

antisocial behaviour, if the section 30 letters are not as routinely used in other parts of the County.

Recommendations for evaluation

The challenges for future evaluation

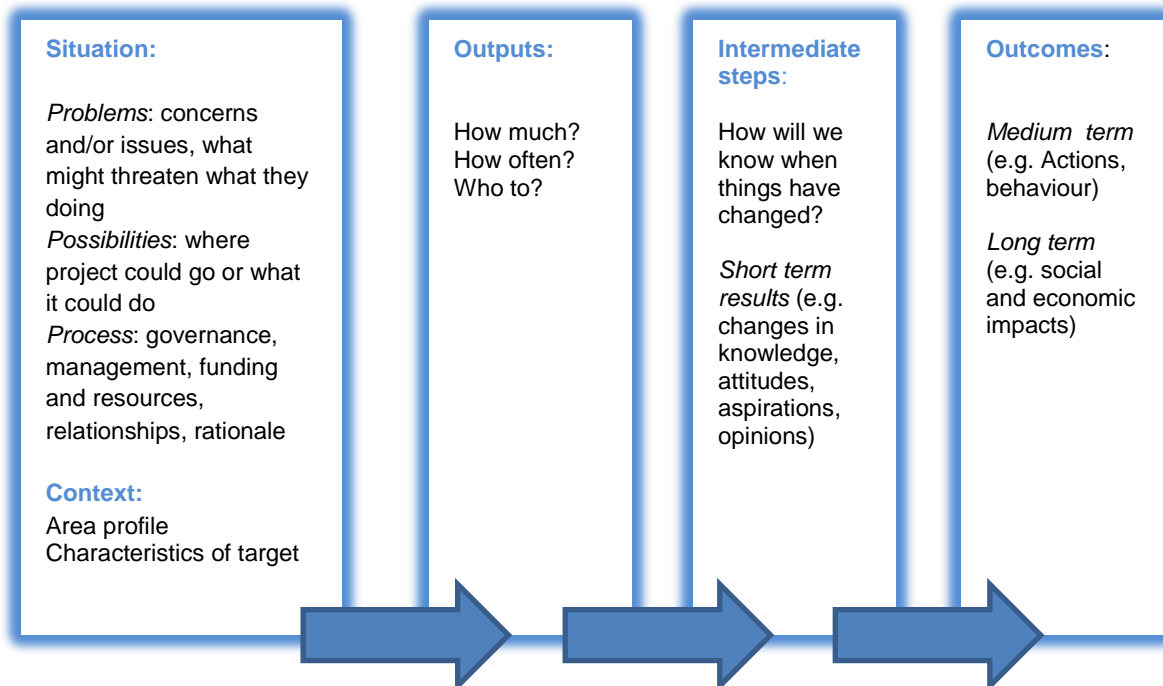
A number of challenges arise from this review that will need to be considered for any future evaluation strategy as follows:

1. Sub 21 has developed as a 'strand of action' rather than as a specific project per se. This means that data that might pertain to any evaluation is not 'owned' by Sub 21, but is held by different agencies. Nevertheless, lots of useful data would seem to be available, e.g. that available for YIP, Positive Futures, and the YMCA which show improvements in behaviour and attitudes over time. All partners would need to demonstrate a commitment to sharing their data (wherever possible) with evaluators.
2. The consistency of quantitative data across elements of Sub 21 would be hard to ensure. No central data source exists, and it would be difficult and time consuming and a duplication of effort, to create one.
3. There may well exist a real diversity of provision, particularly as Sub 21 is rolled out. It has the potential to be a multi-strand initiative, implemented in differing ways and forms in different contexts. This makes it difficult to know, therefore, which activities or combinations of activities produce which outcomes.
4. The definition of what Sub 21 is remains fluid. Evaluation will struggle unless clear boundaries are established between what constitutes Sub 21 and what does not.
5. As discussed previously, disaggregating the impact of Sub 21 from the impact of other initiatives is complex.

A strategy for future evaluation

In order to address the challenges outlined above, we would suggest that an appropriate way to evaluate Sub 21 in the future would be to use a theory of change framework. Theory of change evaluations see outcomes as being the end point of a series of linked changes that are, in turn, linked to specific actions. The 'theory of change' itself, is an articulation of how particular actions are expected to produce intermediate changes, and how these in turn interact to produce outcomes (see figure 1).

Figure 1 A theory of change approach



Thus, any theory of change evaluation can collect evidence about a chain of action, and effect and indicate the likelihood of predicted outcomes occurring in the longer term. Results are on-going, and so can feed into development processes, and indeed, the very action of developing a theory of change can assist in helping project managers to make explicit and articulate what they intend to do. Theory of change evaluations normally start with a scoping stage, in which interviews with the key strategic players are conducted to surface a theory of change: what the situation is they are trying to change; how they intend to do this; what changes they will see as a result of their action; and what outcomes they are hoping to achieve. Following this, an evaluation plan can be devised that will combine quantitative and qualitative evidence on each of the actions, the changes, and where possible, the outcomes. A mixed methodology is used, therefore, based on what evidence can be collected. This may use a combination of methods, for example, collecting documentary evidence and monitoring statistics, surveys, interviews and focus groups. This evidence can be collected from a wide variety of sources including strategic and operational leads, partners, users of the service and beneficiaries.

References

Northumberland County Council (2010) Research Summary: The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 – Northumberland Wards (Electoral Divisions)