

Welcoming Families | Transforming Lives Question and Answer panel

Q: What should I do if my church doesn't want to have new programmes?

- My question would be, 'Are you the leader in that church and your church doesn't want to do it? Or are you the champion in your church who is desperate to do it and your leaders aren't interested?' It's vital to be listening to our community and our local authority, but actually as church we need to listen to each other. Ask within your own congregations 'Why? Why is there reluctance? Why is there reticence? Is it because there's fatigue, and exhaustion?' Sometimes we need to be brave, and start something, however small that is, and show what's possible.

Rachel Dyer

Q: How many of you are using your own church buildings, and how many of you have taken on new spaces?

- It really depends on the building – it's appropriateness, functionality, usability etc. There are a lot of local authorities who are looking at how to use their children's centres as usable spaces. Others have got a custom-built centre. It also depends on the locality of your church. If you're in a great place location wise for the church, but the community you want to serve as a Hub is in a different neighbourhood, it's often best to go and find them.

Ian Soars

- If we're generous with space, that might otherwise be unused throughout the week, then we're helping. Through helping we build relationships, the best foundation for partnering in the community to be a blessing.

Jenny Peters

- During the pandemic, one of the issues locally was families just being stuck at home in really overcrowded conditions, sometimes not able to take their children to school because schools weren't open. One of the church partners we work with made their space available to individual families, which was previously used as a family space. They could just go and have a bit of time to themselves in a nice environment, but it also worked as a drop-in style operation, similar to the drop off at school. As a result, a new community started forming of parents who were in similar situations. If you can do something similar with families, just by making space available to them, it's a good way in to forming relationships. It's a resource that a lot of churches have got, just in slightly different ways.

Steve Bywater

Q: What are some good routes into conversations with local councils if you're struggling?

- The Supporting Families Programme (previously called the 'Troubled Families Programme') is a great place to start. The Programme is being developed as a whole system approach to providing help, with every local authority thinking about how they're going to take it forward. Each local authority has got someone in charge of coordinating it. That person is a great initial point of contact when starting these conversations. Also, local safeguarding children's partnerships are really keen to engage with faith communities and partner with them. Lastly, COVID recovery is in everyone's thinking. Local authorities are developing COVID recovery strategies and are looking for partners in that area. In particular, they are looking for organisations to work with families who received support for the first time as a result of the pandemic, where they have suddenly been in situations where they haven't needed support in the past, but now they do. It could be that your organisations are the ones that know these people and the ones that they trust.

Steve Bywater

Q: How do you move from being referred to from the statutory sector through to having contracts with the statutory sector? How do you get that big jump to being seen as a contract provider, rather than just somebody to be referred to?

- This can often be quite an interesting opportunity. How do we start to have the conversation about who's going to pay for the services we provide? Firstly, make sure you have evidence of the impact you're having on families, and then have a grown-up conversation with the organisations making referrals and ask them what, collectively, we're going to do about this, and how it might be funded. Partnership with a local authority can add real validity to a funding application. But it's a conversation you may need to keep having – be persistent!

Avril McIntyre

- When you're providing a service for free, and it's 'your own house', the rules are yours. But the moment someone is paying for it there is a big step up - that is a serious consideration. You need to think hard about that moment. It will mean you've got to be consistent - you've got to show outcomes. No one gives away money hoping things will just work out. They're going to want to know what happened with that money. How did you spend it? A grant for £10,000 from a local authority will have to be accounted for in £50 measures. You have to show outcomes from where they start to where they finish. Should you choose to make that step, where do you look? Ask your local CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group). Talk to your local councillor. Attend CCG meetings. But before you do that, it's a deep breath moment because it's a big transition.

Ian Soars

- I would say volunteering doesn't equal free; there's a cost, whether a monetary cost or time cost, but there is a cost. Don't forget the value of that. Also, partnership doesn't always need to mean money. We can be in partnership because we're connecting together and we're learning together. The way we ended up in our first service level agreement was because we were doing some volunteer work in a very loose connection with somebody in the council, who then put us in touch with somebody else who put us in touch with somebody else. You never know where those connections might come from. But when you're doing what you're good at, and that's noticed, and you're in those connections, anything can happen.

Rachel Dyer