

Briefing for Children's Quarter

Neighbourhood Network Schemes for Disabled Younger Adults

1. Introduction

This briefing has been prepared by Children's Quarter (CQ) and aims to provide useful information in brief that will help CQ Members to engage positively with Neighbourhood Network Schemes in Birmingham. It introduces both NNS and CQ; provides background and some definitions; includes details about what NNS is; and about small grants that are available as part of NNS.

Neighbourhood Network Schemes (NNS) in Birmingham are a Birmingham City Council (BCC) Adult Social Care (ASC) initiative which is facilitated by local partner organisations in each of the city's 10 districts. The schemes aim to enable vulnerable adults to make better circles of support - including local voluntary and community sector (VSC) groups, as well as families and staff from statutory bodies (the NHS as well as the Council). These circles of support should enable vulnerable adults to live less socially isolated, happier lives with greater confidence and resilience. The initiative was launched in 2017 in respect of older adults (over 50). It was recommissioned by BCC in 2022 and was extended to include disabled younger adults (18-49). NNS is not a small grants scheme, but each district scheme can make grants of up to £10,000 (up to £5000 in Edgbaston and Northfield) to VCS groups for activities and events which help vulnerable adults.

Children's Quarter (CQ) is a Birmingham and West Midlands-based cooperative alliance of groups and organisations that are committed to the inclusion - in services and society - of children and young people, regardless of how they may be disabled. On the face of it, CQ and its Members might not seem obvious partners in work to strengthen the support and opportunities available to disabled adults. However:

- many CQ Member groups provide services for young disabled people up to the age of 30
- the families and communities that set up groups and volunteer for them include many practised advocates for, and developers of, services for younger adults
- younger adults have longer experience living as children and young people than they have as adults until their mid-30s: even into adulthood, our lives are conditioned by our younger years and people in a position to understand them, can sometimes better understand us.

2. Background and Definitions

Adult Social Care (ASC) and Coproduction

ASC is the department of BCC which focuses on improving the health and wellbeing of adults and older people. Over the past 10 years it has embraced changes to move it closer to a coproduction model of delivery: its staff seek to support vulnerable people on the basis of people's own priorities, what we can do for ourselves; and by working to extend what our families, communities and the community groups around us can do. Groups and people which help people do this are called 'community assets' (in the NNS jargon).

NOTE: this is a different type of approach to the one taken in BCC's SEND Children's Services. Although SEND Services also use the work 'coproduction', they tend to use it to mean consultation with representatives of families and young people – more or less to the exclusion of voluntary and community groups. In ASC, it is used to mean working with everyone who has a part to play in helping vulnerable people to live better lives – including voluntary and community groups. This reflects the original definition of what is understood by coproduction:

Coproduction is the idea that the outcomes your organisation wants to achieve can't be achieved by your organisation alone (so you need to cooperate effectively with other people).

'Community Assets'

In the coproduction approach described above, anything which can help a vulnerable person to live the lives they want is called an 'asset' – that is 'something with positive value'. People themselves – their resources, skills, resilience and cognition - are assets. Families and carers usually represent a lot of assets too. People and their own families might be thought of as 'personal assets': they belong to a particular person. Beyond these personal assets are things including physical assets (like parks or bus routes) and social assets (like community groups and the services they provide). These things, shared socially, get called 'community assets'.

NOTE: calling people and groups 'assets' could sound a bit like you are working for a bank (or the security services!) It's probably a good idea to avoid referring to people directly as such: even though the word is used in a positive sense, most people would probably like to think they are more than just 'assets' (which we usually think of as things rather than people).

'Circles of Support' and 'Three Conversations'

The thinking behind NNS is based on coproduction – the idea that the outcomes your organisation wants to achieve can't be achieved by your organisation alone (so you need to cooperate effectively with people). There are two important phrases that help explain how this works out through NNS and that need some definition and background:

Circles (of Support) – this is a way of looking at (vulnerable) people as being at the centre of a circle of people, resources, communities etc (that can support them to achieve a good outcome). At the centre, the individual defines what 'good outcome' and 'support' means; anyone in the circle could provide resources to help achieve it.

NOTE: you could also think of Circles as being *all* the things that influence someone - including the things that hold them back from living a good life: poverty, poor housing, relationship breakdowns, being 'disabled' by society. Helping someone make a better life for themselves can involve helping them to break negative circumstances and influences as well as supporting them with positive ones.

'Three Conversations' – this is a way of finding out about a person's Circle and how to make it more supportive. The three conversations are described in different ways by different people, but basically they revolve around:

- 1) Who are you? What are your strengths and resources? How do you cope? How well are you coping?
- 2) How do you cope when things go wrong, or change? What do you worry about? Are there things that would make you more resilient/feel more secure/supported?
- 3) What is 'coping' all about anyway – what does a 'good life' look like for you?

The idea is that three conversations happen between someone in the NNS (it could be a social worker, but there is no reason it has to be) and the vulnerable person at the centre of a Circle. They are conversations, not questionnaires. Like all good conversations, there is an exchange - both parties share ideas and thinking and they can become as creative as the participants want.

Networks, Networking and Network Development

Thinking around networks represents a further important set of ideas and assumptions in NNS, including:

- Networks are a natural form of relationship between people (and groups) and it is the form that communities tend to take (and find easiest to sustain)
- Networks can exist between people in different organisations (and none) and they are quite different to hierarchies (which exist within organisations);
- We can all wear a number of different 'hats' and, in this way, networks overlap and join up organically depending on the interests and identities of the people and groups in them
- Networks can be strong or weak and can be supportive or can hold people back – not all networks are good and robust
- Networks can be facilitated (eg as simply as introducing people). Network development might look a bit like community development except network development places a lot more emphasis on what people can do for themselves rather than working at length to overcome their weaknesses and shortcomings
- 'Networkers' are simply people who use and develop networks (which at some time or another, is all of us).

3. NNS in More Detail

Aim and Objectives

The purpose of NNS is to enable more vulnerable adults to live better lives by supporting older and disabled people to connect to individuals, groups, organisations, activities, services and places in their neighbourhoods. They work by extending choices and making more resources accessible. Some of these resources are called 'community assets' and they include voluntary and community groups and the services and support provided by them. The priorities of NNS within this aim vary from district to district and are set by local partnerships facilitated by the lead organisation commissioned by BCC.

NNS Building Blocks – What They Do in Practice

The first thing to note is that Neighbourhood Network Schemes are NOT small grants funds. They are part of an approach to coproducing care for vulnerable people. Making small grants is *one* of the interventions that NNS can do to build circles of support around individuals. More widely, NNS are about developing a live network that links anyone and everything that can play a part in improving vulnerable people's welfare and wellbeing and making it more resilient to change.

In practice, what this means in Birmingham can be explained by looking at what Birmingham City Council describes as 'building blocks' in NNS:

- Community Asset Mapping – discovering the local VCS
- Working with Social Workers – Networkers link with staff employed by statutory bodies (more recently, NNS would probably highlight working with NHS as well as BCC staff and not *just* social workers) and help them link with VCS
- Local Marketing and Engagement Plans – Networkers follow a planned approach to engagement and communicating the NNS
- Networking Events - which bring together VCS and statutory bodies
- Coproduction - with citizens including through forums etc
- Partnership Steering Group – Networkers support a local reference group that can help it plan, develop and communicate itself in future
- Gap Analysis – the basis for further development including capacity building and small grants
- Capacity Building Support – training and support for network members
- Grants Process – managing and allocating small grants
- City-Wide Support and Development – this is the role undertaken at BVSC.

NOTE: these 'building blocks' are ongoing and cyclical activities, not one-off 'phases' in developing NNS. Community mapping, for example, should go on in the background all the time – the local VCS is always changing.

What do NNS Lead Facilitators do?

The arrangement in most districts is that an independent lead facilitator organisation (sometimes supported by others) organises and develops: a district partnership; investment in and support for the development of community assets; and the delivery of the NNS 'building blocks' in practice.

The exceptions to this are:

- in Perry Barr and Selly Oak districts, the Council's Neighbourhood Development Support Unit (NDSU) leads the district partnership;
- in Edgbaston and Northfield districts, the Heart of England Community Foundation manages the small grants that form part of the investment the NNS makes in local community assets.

What is BVSC's role?

BCC commissions BVSC to facilitate regular meetings involving BCC and the district NNS lead to discuss trends, patterns and share successes/challenges; to develop NNS leads to ensure effective delivery in the districts; to collect, analyse and share learning; to support the BCC Commissioners as 'critical friends'; and to support impact measurement.

Recommissioning of NNS in 2022

In April 2022, BCC re-commissioned NNS' for a further five years and added disabled younger adults (aged 18-49) to their remit alongside older adults (50 and over). This means NNS now includes adults with disabilities and long term health conditions, in particular people with: physical or sensory impairment, poor mental health, learning disabilities or who are autistic or have ADHD. The extension of NNS to cover Disabled Younger Adults was piloted in two districts – Hodge Hill and Sutton Coldfield) in 2021.

Alongside the inclusion of Disabled Younger Adults in NNS, other changes in 2022 included:

- 'NNS Connected Communities' which will develop community assets for small or dispersed communities across the City. The priorities have been identified as: Gypsy, Roma & Traveller, LGBTQ and Deaf People.
- NNS Digital – established as part of efforts to tackle digital exclusion.

4. NNS Lead Facilitator Information and Small Grants

District	Lead Facilitator	Contacts	Notes
Edgbaston	Age UK Gateway Family Services	Bartley Green, Weoley or Shenley: Natalie Tichareva tel: 07809336283 or email natalie.tichareva@ageukbirmingham.org.uk NNSedgbaston@ageukbirmingham.org.uk Edgbaston, Harborne or Quinton: Tel 0800 599 9880 or email info@gatewayfs.org	Heart of England CF manages small grants which go up to £5000 Small grant guidance
Erdington	Witton Lodge Community Association	Debbie Bates at WLCA: Tel 0121 382 1930 or email: Debbie.bates@wittonlodge.org.uk Chantelle Holmes Tel 0121 382 1930 or email: Chantelle.holmes@wittonlodge.org.uk See also Erdington NNS Facebook	Compass Support also help to facilitate the NNS
Hall Green	Green Square Accord	Tel: 07584 500595 HallGreen.NNSTeam@greensquareaccord.co.uk See also Hall Green NNS Facebook	Small grant guidance
Hodge Hill	Pohwer	HodgeHillNNS@pohwer.net or Tel: 0121 726 8577 See also Hodge Hill NNS Facebook	Piloted NNS for Younger Adults in 2022 Small grant guidance
Ladywood	Birmingham Settlement	Maxine.reid@bsettlement.org.uk See also Ladywood NNS Facebook	Karis Neighbour Scheme , Nechells Pod and Soho First also help facilitate the NNS
Northfield	Northfield Community Partnership	NNSTeam@northfieldcommunity.org See also Northfield NNS Facebook	Heart of England CF manages small grants which go up to £5000 Small grant guidance
Perry Barr	NDSU	Neil de Costa Neil.De-Costa@birmingham.gov.uk	

District	Lead Facilitator	Contacts	Notes
Selly Oak	NDSU/ Birmingham Community Matters	Karen Cheney Tel: 0121 675 8519 Karen.cheney@birmingham.gov.uk	
Sutton Coldfield	Age Concern	NNS@ageconcernbirmingham.org.uk	piloted NNS for Younger Adults in 2022
Yardley	Disability Resource Centre	Msummers@disability.co.uk Tel: 0799 904 269 See also Yardley NNS Facebook	

NNS Small Grants for Disabled Younger Adults

The objectives of the grants can be set locally by each district NNS, but the overall aim is (approximately) that the grants should fund activities and events that help strengthen the Circles of support around disabled younger adults and enable them to live happier lives with greater confidence and resilience.

Younger disabled adults are defined as 18-49 year olds with a long-term disability who are living in the community and who can access and participate in activities independently or with a carer. In particular, people who are disabled on the basis of:

- a learning disability
- a physical disability
- being autistic and/or having ADHD
- their mental health
- sensory loss or impairment.

The grants are not aimed at helping disabled younger adults with complex needs.

Application forms, details and weightings of applications vary from district to district (hence the importance of forming a relationship with your local NNS, rather than seeing it simply as the source of a small grant). In general, NNS small grants may look for evidence of:

Coproduction - including in the design, delivery and evaluation of the activity or event

Sustainability – how will the benefits of what you do be sustained (not necessarily the activity or event itself) and the part your track record in the area will play in this

Learning – how does what you propose to do relate to understanding about needs and ways of addressing them and what learning might it bring

There are also variations in eligibility criteria for groups applying for small grants and in priority themes (although these are often broad enough to encompass most proposals).

5. Intention and Amendment

This briefing is intended for use by CQ Members but should not be relied on as a sole, authoritative source of information when making any decisions. In other words, please use the briefing as a means to get in touch with other people; to get more information; and to help develop your own thoughts and ideas. Updates, amendments, additions and corrections are welcomed!

To update, amend or discuss this briefing or to add further briefings, please contact:

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Children's Quarter is a cooperative of groups providing services to children, young people and their families which aspire to, advocate for and commit to inclusion and to working collaboratively with each other to achieve it. We believe children and young people who are disabled or have mental health or other additional needs, and their families, should be fully included in society and properly served by public services. CQ is a co-operative company run by its members and registered at Companies House with company no 11001331 and registered address at All Saints Centre, 2 Vicarage Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7RA