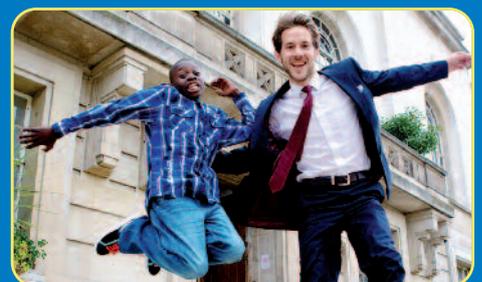




The first report of the Early Action Task Force

The Triple Dividend

Thriving lives. Costing less. Contributing more.



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More information: www.community-links.org

Introduction

The Triple Dividend: The first report of the Early Action Task Force

THIS STORY BEGINS AT COMMUNITY LINKS. We are a social action charity in east London working with more than 25,000 people every year. Early action – building a fence at the top of the cliff rather than running an ambulance at the bottom – has been at the heart of our strategy for 35 years. It is an approach that has been echoed in politicians’ speeches for at least two decades but seldom embraced on any scale in public policy.

Government spending has been cut over the last year but the rhetoric from the top has been no less sympathetic to the preventative approach, indeed it’s been louder than ever. We thought it was time to unpick that paradox and try to understand why common sense is not finding its way into common practice.

Early action is sometimes used as shorthand for services for under-fives. This report is not just about them. Their needs are very important, but forestalling problems, rather than coping with the consequences, is socially and financially a smart thing to do from cradle to grave. Nor are we only interested in theory or in perfect worlds. Community Links wrestles with the reality of troubled lives day-in, day-out. This report reflects that experience.

We’ve drawn together a Task Force of experts who share our concerns. We have asked ourselves: *‘How do we build a society that prevents problems from occurring rather than one that, as now, copes with the consequences?’*

Not every member of the Task Force would support every idea in this paper. The Task Force is an advisory group and this is a document for discussion, not a manifesto. What unites us is the view that early action should not be an afterthought but should be a fundamental principle, shaping the way in which both government and civil society spend their resources and judge their success. Investing wisely and early in social wellbeing promotes prosperity, reduces debt, increases growth, encourages fairness and social mobility and ultimately builds a sustainable society.

Of course, you could say that we would say that wouldn’t we? But it’s not just us that’s saying it. Take this observation, for instance, from a 2009 Audit Commission report: *‘A young person who starts showing behavioural problems at age five, and is dealt with through the criminal justice system will cost the taxpayer around £207,000 by the age of 16. Alternative interventions to*

Why isn't common sense finding its way into common practice?

support changes in behaviour would cost about £47,000. Over £113 million a year would be saved if just one in ten young offenders was diverted towards effective support.'

We are not advocating a particular intervention but seeking to share what is known across the sectors, to understand and to challenge the barriers and to inject some new ideas and some new energy into driving forward our vision of a society that needs fewer resources for crisis response because it has developed the strengths to prevent.

Nailing the myths

Three oft-repeated generalisations get in the way of a sensible discussion so we will deal with them very briefly right away.

First *'preventative programmes take years to bear fruit and yield savings'*. The truth of this depends on the programme. Spending on a summer play scheme reduces anti-social behaviour and low-level crime over the school holidays. Invest in July, save by September. Spending on an early years programme that sets entry into university as its objective will inevitably take twenty years but even here there will be indicators along the way.

Of course, it may take a generation to achieve deep and fundamental change, but we don't have to wait that long for the first benefits.

Second *'savings are not cashable'*. Again, it depends on the programme. You can't close 1% of a prison if you reduce the prison population by 1%, but every additional family in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation incurs additional direct costs night-by-night. Some programmes only achieve cashable savings at scale. Others save immediately.

Third *'there isn't enough good evidence to sustain the argument that prevention works'*. Different people mean different things by 'good evidence'. We deal with the issue in some detail in this report. In brief we make the distinction between the high-level 'common sense' case which is widely supported ('improving children's reading skills will save money in the long run') and the practical 'business' case for government or independent investment in particular programmes which is more often contested ('my "Reading Loudly to Children" programme will improve their literacy and therefore save money').

Our thinking so far

In this report we suggest that we need to:

■ **Change the conversation** The conventional language of prevention, avoiding the worst, presupposes problems, victims, perpetrators. It is pessimistic, reductive and discouraging. The language of 'readiness', becoming the best that we can be, identifies assets and builds on strengths. It is optimistic, aspirational and motivating. We envisage a society that is ready for everything characterised by **'Enabling services'** that equip us to flourish and by **'Prompt interventions'** that pick up and respond to the first signs of difficulty.

■ **Understand the triple dividend** Politicians have been talking for years about the economic as well as the social case for earlier action but it is invariably understated. Early action isn't only cheaper than later action and important for social wellbeing; it helps to reduce the deficit and to increase growth. A population that is 'ready for everything' contributes more, public spending goes down and growth goes up: thriving lives, costing less, contributing more. That's why this topic may not be new but is so timely in 2011.

■ **Recognise what works** The report draws out ten lessons from some of the most successful early action projects in the third sector and a further five from government initiatives. These case studies and more are available on line at www.community-links.org/earlyaction.

■ **Develop the business case** The high level economic case is not the same as the practical business case for specific interventions. Here evidence is patchy and contested. Data collected for different funders has used different processes and indicators, undermining the validity of comparisons and conclusions. We propose development of a ‘common core’ in monitoring and evaluation.

■ **Service the bureaucratic plumbing** Spending rules, organisational and departmental silos and a distorted translation of ministerial intentions are blocking progress. We identify 12 barriers in this report and then put forward a range of practical, structural improvements and a process for steady but incremental transition.

■ **Shift attitudes and culture** Often, we’ve found, it isn’t primarily rules or resources that get in the way. It is attitudes and culture, customs and practice; this must be understood and challenged.

■ **Encourage alliances and leadership** Becoming a society that is ready for everything is about more than public service reform and it is also about less. More, because it must engage us all, across the sectors. We need powerful alliances and we suggest a process for developing them. Less, because most of the change that we seek is achievable without legislation. We need leadership that will challenge convention.

We hope to generate new thinking and further collaboration with a set of ideas across these themes which we offer as ‘**Advice**’. Where we have already made some progress with collaborators we report on ‘**Action underway**’ and on each idea we indicate the ‘**Next steps**’. Some of our ideas are practical but others are more speculative. We hope that these suggestions will stimulate debate and generate better ones.

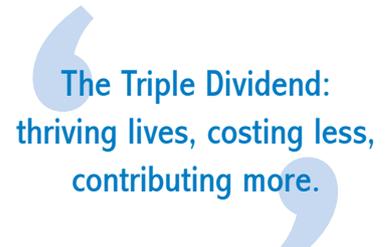
We conclude the report with an account of recent developments in Scotland where between 40% and 45% of local public expenditure is ‘negative’, that is, dealing with the consequences of problems rather than preventing them from occurring. There are no comparable figures for the UK overall, but also no reason to suppose that they would be very different if there was. The Scottish government’s September 2011 budget included a £500m increase in preventative spending despite a 9.2% reduction in cash from Whitehall. Our aspirations for the whole of the UK are ambitious. Scotland shows what can be achieved.

We will report again next May on the development of these early ideas and on the impact of the activity, and then set out plans and proposals for sustained development.

Please tell us what you think.

David Robinson

david.robinson@community-links.org



The Triple Dividend:
thriving lives, costing less,
contributing more.

Chance UK



Thomas is a quiet 10-year-old who became increasingly sullen and violent at school, after his father ran away leaving his mother and three siblings. He was sent home for threatening to stab someone. Every weekend for a year he spent time with mentor Richard, a journalist – they played sport, visited the park, and went on the London Eye. After the project ended, Thomas was elected class representative by his peers.

Chance UK run an early intervention programme working with 5-11 year olds with behavioural difficulties in four London boroughs. Those children most likely to go on to criminal, offending behaviour later in life. With the agreement of their families, the children are matched with adult, volunteer mentors who has been selected, given three days training, and asked to commit to 2-4 hours per week for a year. Chance UK staff monitor the relationship closely, and have a professional parent worker who supports families.

Evaluations show 98% of young people see improvements in their behaviour, and for 51% this takes them below the threshold for being considered at risk. The project costs £4000 per year per child, which compares with a total cost to society of £63,000 for a child being excluded from school. They also sell the model to other organisations around the UK as a social franchise.

of the capacity of legal advice agencies is taken up with work generated by systems failures in organisations like the Department of Work and Pensions. We look at this in more detail on page 35.

And early action isn't always focused on the very earliest stage of a problem. Sometimes it's too late for that. Here we use the term to describe any activity which is deliberately forestalling a more serious problem. Thus it might cover a spectrum of prompt interventions from, for instance, crime prevention measures, to rehabilitation work with offenders.

Changing the conversation

Action Underway: Finding the words

Spencer DuBois have been working pro-bono with the Task Force on developing new terms for talking about early action which are not defined against the negative but rooted in the positive. It is about becoming what we want to be rather than avoiding the worst.

The conventional language of prevention, avoiding the worst, presupposes problems, victims, perpetrators. It is pessimistic, reductive, discouraging. The language of readiness, becoming the best that we can be, identifies assets and builds on strengths. It is optimistic, aspirational and motivating.

We picture a society which is defined not against the countless things that don't happen – heart disease, under-achievement at school, violence in the family – but by reference to its strengths. Its people are ready and able to benefit from opportunity, to learn at primary school, to thrive in secondary, they are job-ready at 17 and when the time comes they are ready and able to be good parents. Because we all experience difficulties at some point in our lives, they are ready and able also to manage adversity – to cope with losing a job or a relationship, to rebuild after illness or bereavement, to adapt to change.

We picture a society which is defined not against the countless things that don't happen... but by reference to its strengths

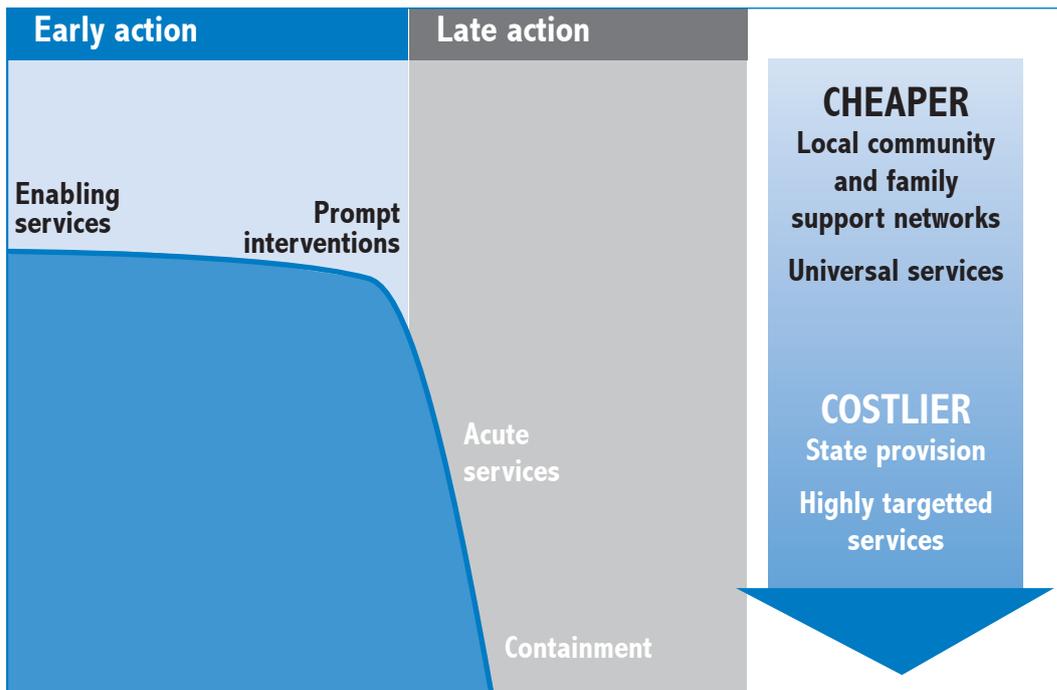
We picture this 'ready for everything' community at the top of a cliff (opposite), where universal **Enabling Services** and clear rules equip us to flourish, protect us from harm and prepare us for change.

Even here things will sometimes go wrong. **Prompt interventions** at the cliff edge pick up the first signs of difficulty and respond to them, targeting services at individuals, families and communities with identified problems which, if not forestalled, could, in many cases, lead to more serious difficulties. An open access play scheme, a learning support group or detached youth work in communities where many young people are on the streets might be examples of such a 'prompt intervention'.

Further down the cliff face the service becomes more targeted at those with more developed problems and prompt intervention gets closer to an **Acute service**. Eventually it is primarily focused on **Containing** a problem at the bottom of the cliff rather than on forestalling it.

Looking at the diagram opposite, **Early action** describes the **enabling services** and the **prompt interventions** at, or close to, the top of the cliff. These are about being the best that we can be. **Late action** kicks in once the problem has tipped over, essential but, in every sense, a last resort. In this report we are concerned with all those activities, services and behaviours that might be described as early action at the top of, or on the edge of the cliff.

Re-imagining the prevention agenda with this different vocabulary shifts our thinking away from attacking negatives and onto developing the positives. It is from this alternative perspective that we can envisage, and build, the society we seek.



In an early action society we would:

- Excavate and uproot the causes of problems.
- Invest in our quality of life now and in our children's futures, rather than store up ever greater social, health and environmental problems which our children will have to pay for.
- Build readiness. Invest in people's capabilities before they need welfare, rather than stepping in when people are not able to provide for themselves. It is an 'enabling state' – the antithesis of the 'nanny state' and the next evolutionary step beyond the 'welfare state.'

Stories of Success

The Reading Recovery Programme

Reading Recovery is a short-term intensive literacy intervention programme for primary school children who are experiencing problems with reading and writing after their first year of school.

There are over 60 Reading Recovery centres throughout the UK, Ireland and Denmark. It consists of intensive daily 30 minute one-to-one lessons over a period of approximately 20 weeks, held with a trained literacy teacher. Poor literacy has been shown to be a serious



disadvantage in later life, particularly harming employment chances: the cost to society over an

individual's lifetime could be as high as £64,000, around £2bn for all those affected. The programme is estimated to save between £11 and £17 for every £1 spent.

Reading Recovery is the foundation intervention for Every Child a Reader, the UK literacy intervention programme, and is funded by a combination of government and private funds.

A shared responsibility

The responsibility for creating this society is shared by us all. The incentives to change rest not only with the government policy makers but also with the insurance company directors who lose money in certain postcodes, with the police authority who pick up the bill for more anti-social behaviour when a youth club closes, with the hospital managers whose accident and emergency department deal with more children who fall down stairs or trap their fingers in the doors of their social housing homes than any other single problem, with the public utility or the credit card company whose clients can't meet their debts, with the councillors whose small number of multi-problem families cost the council a disproportionate amount, with the tax-payer, the rate-payer, the customer and the neighbour.

...hard-wiring
early action into our
society through a shared
vision supported by the
right incentives

Government has an important *leadership* role, developing a clear economic, political, business and social case for early action and embedding that narrative in the DNA of every public agency. How it sets priorities, then spends public money and sets the right incentives for earlier action is vital too. It's a critical *enabler* but it cannot deliver a society that is ready for everything without fully engaging every interest and every individual.

Individuals, families, communities, businesses, voluntary sector organisations and charitable foundations, all are equally important. How they use their resources – their potential, their human capital, their personal time as well as their money – all of these things can have an enormous impact on wellbeing and on the strength of our communities.

Ultimately we believe that effective partnership between government and civil society is essential. This isn't about everyone doing the same thing, stifling innovation. Rather, it's about hard-wiring early action into our society through a shared vision and narrative supported by the right incentives to deliver it.

Creating an Early Action state

Currently public services almost invariably engage when things go wrong, acting as the ultimate 'safety net,' rather than investing in getting things right first time. There are areas where this is not the case: education and health, for example, where the state's enabling role is now accepted in varying degrees. In other areas, such as in the criminal justice system, the model is largely one of stepping in once problems have occurred, with a contested debate about whether the correct role of the state is punishment or rehabilitation. Under the last government, there were experiments in a cross-government approach which continue in some areas, for example, mental health, today.

These different approaches are explored further in the box opposite.

The current political and economic environment

There are several touch points within the current political and economic environment which make a further major shift towards early action now particularly timely and perhaps more likely.

Growing consensus in some areas of early action A cross-party consensus is emerging around some issues, evidenced by a succession of government reports over many years. Several have focused, in whole or in part, on the early years and enjoyed widespread political support.

Wellbeing Prime Minister David Cameron's determination to measure and promote not just economic but wider wellbeing and to evaluate new policy in terms of social, not just economic and financial benefits, creates a new way of recognising, costing, valuing and developing early

Governments and early action: how does government score?

■ Education: the nearest to the state as enabler?

Education is one of the purest forms of early action. Before 1870, state-funded education was only available under the Poor Law in England and Wales. At first it was introduced up to the age of 12 and has been progressively extended ever since.

At the very end of the last century, the government began to invest more in education in the very early years, based on academic research which demonstrated the importance of a good start in life and was linked to a drive to reduce child poverty. The creation of Sure Start and children's centres, the extension of early education to all three- and four-year-olds, the creation of transfer payments to help lower income parents pay for quality childcare, and improved support for working parents in the shape of better parental leave and access to flexible working – all these were designed to help give children a better start.

Despite these advances, it is widely recognised that significantly more investment in the early years is needed, yet recent local cuts have threatened some children's centres.

■ Health: a mixed picture with a lot more to do?

Around 170 years ago Lyon Playfair was showing that of the 102,000 Lancastrians who died in 1841, 14,000 deaths, and a further 398,000 cases of illness, had been preventable. He calculated, with awesome precision, that the financial cost to the county was £5,133,557. Through the second half of the 19th century, **good** health was increasingly recognised as a proper concern for government. One and a half centuries later prevention and a commitment to sustaining good health sit alongside acute provision.

However, investment in public health is still only a tiny part of the health budget. In recent decades, renewed emphasis has been placed on public health through the Wanless and other reviews, and on tackling new 'epidemics' with social as well as physical causes such as smoking, obesity and poor mental health.

■ Environment: high hopes, uncertain performance?

The ground-breaking Stern Review, published in 2006, made a compelling economic case for investment in a new form of early action, action to stop global warming, helping to justify expensive and unpopular preventative steps to forestall major negative consequences in the future. Ambitious targets have been set by the present government but it is unclear whether they will remain in place given wider economic pressures.

■ Criminal justice: the next frontier?

Tony Blair's commitment to be '*tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime*' led to a series of initiatives to tackle youth crime, but the prison population – and the costs of prisons – still grew. More recently, the 'Breaking the Cycle' government Green Paper published in 2010 set out plans to try to '*break the destructive cycle of crime*'. But these have been politically controversial with those who consider that punishment, not rehabilitation should be the role of the state.

■ Cross-government action: the true sign of an enabling government

Government reviews have repeatedly stressed the interconnectedness of early action issues – for example, the connection between poor mental health and unemployment, poor housing, unsafe communities. An early action approach across all public services has the potential to create a virtuous circle and would be the sign of a true, 'enabling state.' There was a strong political push under the last government towards cross-cutting action through the Social Exclusion Unit established in 1997. Some cross-cutting initiatives are currently being taken forward, for example, on mental health, but there is a very long way to go.

Fight for Peace

Using boxing and martial arts as a hook, Fight for Peace promotes education, personal development and leadership amongst young people. It began in 2000 in the Complexo da Maré, a complex of favelas (shantytowns) in Rio de Janeiro and



opened its London Academy in Newham in 2007.

The core boxing and martial arts training is complemented by a programme of personal development education which all young people who attend the open access sports are

expected to attend. The programme includes 1:1 mentoring, education and employment workshops and personal support.

A survey of young people attending the project in 2010 found that 91% found it easier to make friends, 87% felt better about themselves and 67% said they were less likely to commit a crime. Evaluations by the University of East London and United Nations Development Programme suggest it is effective at giving young people the skills to turn away from crime.

The club works with about 200 people per month at an annual budget of £500,000. It is funded by a range of charitable and corporate donations, as well as being commissioned to deliver some services by the local authority and local schools.

action. This has been linked to an interest in strengthening local communities and civil society, which is, in turn, connected to evidence that social capital – the networks, norms and sanctions that bond, bridge and link people within relationships, communities and society – is declining most notably in some of the Anglo-Saxon nations – USA, Australia, Britain.

Tackling the social as well as the financial deficit In response to the 2011 summer riots, the Prime Minister promised to give priority to tackling social problems alongside tackling the financial deficit. There are some signs that investment in earlier action, rather than being seen as simply an additional cost, is increasingly being recognised by government as something that might help reduce the financial deficit.

Independent scrutiny The creation of an independent Office of Budget Responsibility to assess the long-term sustainability of the public finances is an opportunity to argue for building in early action to help achieve sustainability. Early success, resulting in the literate school-leaver, the productive employee, the collaborative citizen contributes to an increasing GDP. The case for early action is usually argued around reduced expenditure but fiscal progress is also achieved through economic growth.

Early success results in literate school-leavers, productive employees, collaborative citizens, all contributing to increased GDP

An interest in new financial instruments New financial instruments as part of the funding mix for financing early action have attracted ministerial enthusiasm and a lot of attention in recent months. Current work on results-based payment and, in particular, the Social Impact Bond, has shown how, in specific circumstances, it is now possible to finance the transition.

These may be isolated strands of government thinking and activity, but collectively they suggest an emerging understanding of early action as an organising philosophy for developing and delivering public services across the board and for achieving a sustainable economy. The opening rhetoric of the Open Public Services White Paper in July 2011 hinted at this potential.

'Because the forces which restrict opportunity for some inflict an injury on all. The failure to educate every child to the maximum of their abilities is not just a moral failure to accord every person equal worth, it is a piece of economic myopia which leaves us all poorer... And, as with education, so with housing, healthcare, civil space and sporting chances.'

Prime Minister and Deputy PM in the Foreword to Open Public Services White Paper, July 2011

These developments are all encouraging, but we should also echo a warning. Several independent reviews commissioned over the last decade have described the chasm between political enthusiasm and execution on the ground. *'What is striking is that there has been so much written often covering similar ground and apparently sound, setting out the well-known major determinants of health, but rigorous implementation of identified solutions has often been sadly lacking'* wrote Derek Wanless in his 2004 Review, *Securing Good Health for the Whole Population*. He went on, *'If we are going to capitalise on the growing cross-party support for early action, we must recognise and tackle the barriers, align the incentives and, first and foremost, we must win hearts and minds throughout Whitehall, local government, public services and wider civil society'*.

Early action should not be seen as peripheral to government goals but a way of achieving them

The 'Triple Dividend'

Winning those hearts and minds is dependant on the successful development of a compelling economic and social case for early action which is well understood throughout government in its many forms, and which starts at the top.

The case has been made by numerous government reports, but has been swiftly forgotten. Early action should not be seen as peripheral to government goals but a way of achieving them, perhaps the only way in the present climate, delivering social, financial and economic benefits:

A determined transition to early action would:

- **Develop people who are happy and capable and ready for everything**, creating strong communities, investing in deep-value relationships, generating social capital and ensuring that everyone has the support they need throughout their lives to reach their full potential.
- **Reduce costs**, helping to tackle an unsustainable deficit by investing in provision that will reduce the cost of future liabilities.
- **Strengthen growth**, increasing the competitiveness of the UK. Building human, economic and social capital, so widening prosperity rather than simply consuming and even destroying these resources.

It is only when we understand this, the triple dividend, that we really appreciate the significance of readiness, the value of an enabling society and the importance of acting early, preventing problems from occurring, not picking up the pieces and counting the costs.

Children North East's 'BU' diploma in wellbeing

When 12 year old Sarah began attending 'BU' diploma classes she was unruly and disruptive. As the course progressed she settled down, started contributing, and soon became the life and soul of the group. She also began telling school staff about her problems at home and difficulty controlling her anger. By the end of the course she was teaching other students about relaxation techniques.

Children North East's 'BU' diploma in wellbeing is an accredited course developed by young people, to improve young people's self esteem, confidence and wellbeing. It is delivered to 8-13 year olds in schools and in Children NE's own centres, consists of about 25 one hour sessions in groups of around ten. Completion of the course is officially recognised with a diploma.

The project pilot, delivered with 80 young people between 2008-10 showed significant improvements in measures of confidence,



ability to discuss problems, accessing social activities, and happiness.

Children NE have secured four years Big Lottery funding to roll out the project more widely, and are finding schools are willing to spot-purchase the course, extending its reach. The course costs £14 per student per hour, which compares to £48 for a Child and Adolescent Health Practitioner.

Section Two

What's happening in practice and what can we learn from it?

IN THE LAST SECTION we reflected on where we would like to be, on the nature of a society that is ready for everything. We suggested a narrative which captures the broad political, social and economic reasons for change. Here we approach the subject from the opposite end, understanding where we are now, reflecting on the stories that show how and why early action works on the ground and the ten lessons we can learn from these examples. Some of the stories are dotted throughout this report. Many more can be found at www.community-links.org/earlyaction.

We look first at projects run by voluntary sector organisations and then consider some additional lessons from national initiatives begun by government.

Voluntary sector projects

Action Underway: Building a multi story movement.

We have found that many early action projects imagined themselves to be ploughing a lonely furrow. In gathering stories to inform our work we have also begun to make connections for shared learning. We have established an online gallery presenting the key facts of each project in a standard format and linked the projects with a regular mailing.

> **Next Steps** We will be developing this resource both to provide mutual support and to give voice to this multi-story movement. *‘Early action works. Here’s how now. And here’s how we could do better’*, www.community-links.org/earlyaction.

None of our ‘lessons’ necessarily apply across all projects, and there are many more projects we could have featured. Ours is not intended as a definitive list of the ‘best’ – to try and produce this would stifle the growth of many well-resourced, well-evidenced, and well-shared schemes, not our intention at all.

The projects featured in this report are predominantly ‘prompt interventions’, targeted at particular groups or individuals, not yet universal services (although some could be) and mostly characterised by patchy coverage and fragmented implementation. We are not, for example, talking about schools – a dramatic example of enabling services. Just as schooling used to be fragmented and available only to a few, so modern-day prompt interventions are scattered, often charitably-funded, and sporadic. And just as universal schooling was introduced towards the end of the 19th century, we hope for a transformation in early action at the beginning of the 21st.

At the beginning of this century there is a context we cannot ignore. The most consistent feature of these projects is that their work is with people on low incomes, usually in areas of high deprivation. A society with smaller disparities between those with most and least money would be a more enabling society. Prompt interventions fill the gap that exists in provision between enabling services and last-gasp containment, but ultimately we hope even these will be considered too late. Embedded in this enabling society, we believe, will necessarily be greater equality of outcome as well as of opportunity.

■ Based on 'Deep Value' relationships

A striking common thread running through effective early action projects is the importance of the human relationship between the person providing and the person using the service. Mentoring projects such as **Children North East's 'Youth Link'** project, or **Chance UK** in London illustrate this well, with lengthy weekly meetings between troubled young people and their volunteer mentor designed almost solely to build relationships which ultimately change lives.

When you feel that someone cares, then you care

Dave Murphy, a Swindon resident, talking about his experience of Particle's Life programme, supporting troubled families.

Community Links coined the term **Deep Value**, to describe the value produced when the relationships between people delivering and people using services are effective. In these relationships, it is the practical transfer of knowledge that creates the conditions for progress, but it is the deeper qualities of the human bond that nourish confidence, inspire self esteem, unlock potential, erode inequality and so have the power to transform.

There is considerable evidence that these relationships are not just nice-to-have, but often a critical component of success. Community Links' Deep Value report (*Bell and Smerdon 2011*) highlights much of this work, and some projects apply directly to early action. For example, the **Wisconsin University 'What Works'** project has distilled from meta-analysis the features of effective family support programmes – that they 'work through and for good relationships' is crucial.

Nurse Family Partnerships are widely-recognised as a successful model, evaluated and replicated across the world including recently in the UK. Their success hinges on the two and a half year relationship established between a registered nurse and a young mother, beginning months before the child is born and continuing until their second birthday.

It is clear that effective relationships need, at the very least, the time to develop, a shared understanding of the goal and commitment to achieving it, collaboration and effective communication. Perhaps most importantly they are underpinned by a sense of empowerment: the aim of service should not be to control or make people dependent but to be the influence that allows them to be free. Many of these are explored in the next few pages.

Effective support helps people to build on their potential and strengths, to develop skills, ways of thinking and behaviour that helps them to cope differently with challenges in the future. This may involve challenge and confrontation but if the other elements of effective relationships are in place, the result can be very powerful.

■ Designed from a thorough understanding of the issue

Made of Money – an award-winning project run by Quaker Social Action in East London – takes the traditional financial literacy course one stage further. It recognises that the way families talk and think about money is as important as a working knowledge of bank accounts or debt repayments. A child demands the latest toys, just like their friends at school, and parents who can't afford them feel the worst kind of guilt, that of having let down their child. Spending seems the only option.

So the course works with the whole family, supporting them to communicate and share their

hopes and fears about money, as well as conveying some of the practical knowledge of how financial products work. Debt, in this context, is not about knowledge but about family relations.

This deep understanding of complex issues is evident across successful early action projects. It's an understanding that is only gained through close and meaningful engagement with people experiencing a problem, or even better by asking people to design the work themselves. **Children North East's 'BU' Diploma** is an accredited course in mental-health for young people, developed by young people themselves. Taken by students in school, it helps tackle or avert some of the issues young people might be facing, and leaves them with a qualification at the end.

Participle, in their work with troubled families in Swindon, sent staff to live for three months in the same estate as the families they were to be working with, before they designed the programme, to make sure they understood all the issues properly. And the work of the **St Giles Trust**, mentoring ex-offenders, is delivered by ex-offenders themselves – people with personal experience of the challenges facing those leaving prison.

■ Start from a presumption of willingness

Good early action projects build on the recognition that we all want to prosper and succeed – they nurture, uncover or remove the barriers to that ambition, rather than trying to force people along a path they don't want to take.

This is perhaps obvious in programmes which require participants to engage voluntarily, where signing up to the project indicates an embrace of its aim. Even then, reaching this shared goal can be time consuming. For example, **Chance UK** make it clear that both the young person being mentored and their family must want to engage in the process for it to go ahead. This is not always immediately forthcoming, which is why staff visit the family first to explain in depth the project, its benefits and its conditions.

Community Links' **Future Links** scheme works with young people not in education, employment or training – a group often stigmatised but in our experience desperate to build their future. And Upper Room's **UR4 Driving** project works with ex-offenders, who receive free driving lessons and entry into the test in return for volunteering at the charity's foodbank. Participants jump at the opportunity of gaining a driving licence – a valuable ticket into employment – but for many their commitment to the project means they remain as volunteers even after finding a job. In both examples, people who might be stereotyped as unwilling to engage are desperate to do so given the opportunity. Early action knows this. It has a 'presumption of willingness' – that people want to succeed and that a refusal to engage is ultimately a failure of the project not the individual.

■ Clear a path to success rather than building barriers to failure

A neighbourhood police notice in east London boasted of its success in tackling underage drinking through an 'early intervention' approach; targeting shops selling alcohol to under 18s. But arguably this tactic, making it harder to buy alcohol but not addressing why young people were doing so in the first place, is not early action in the sense of most of the projects featured here.

There undoubtedly is a role for preventative actions that shut off avenues to failure – health and safety legislation literally does build the fence at the top of the cliff. But good early action does more than shut off the route to failure, it enables people to succeed.

Fight for Peace uses boxing and martial arts as a hook to engage with young people who, with nowhere to go in the evenings, could be those putting local shopkeepers under pressure to sell them something to do. As well as the boxing and martial arts training (which is taken seriously) Fight for Peace offer a programme of personal development education which all young people who participate in the open-access sports are expected to attend – it covers issues such as drugs or

alcohol awareness, employment and career support, youth support services such as mentoring and case work, and a youth leadership programme. In short, they provide a positive alternative.

■ Are skilled in what they do

Early action projects are delivered by a diverse bunch, from the highly trained mental health professional intervening in the life of a troubled family through family intervention projects, to the thirteen-year-old mentoring an eleven-year-old in school, or the ex-offender volunteering to mentor other ex-offenders with St Giles Trust.

But this diverse group shares one thing in common: they are highly skilled. Whether acquired through experience, or formal training, these skills can be codified, selected for, and taught. This is most obvious at the professional level, where job descriptions, rigorous interviews, appraisals and monitoring ensure that teachers, nurses, mental health workers and staff possess the appropriate skills. But even volunteer mentoring projects have a selection and training process, often almost as rigorous as those for paid staff. In fact, every one of the projects we've featured is delivered by people who are all selected in some way.

In their recent publication **Out of the Ordinary**, Community Links began to unpick the skills of staff in community centres, using the people who run the Rokeby Community Hub as examples. Much of this work would be applicable across early action projects.

■ Tell the good story, not the bad

When talking about this work it is easy to fall into talking about problems – the negative rather than the positive. No doubt we have strayed over the line in this report, partly because – as Section One recognises – there often isn't the vocabulary to express the social equivalent of good health.

But in reality we all need help at some time in our lives and there should be no negative label attached to services that provide it. When a parent takes a child swimming or to the park they don't think of it as a diversion from crime, yet its safe, stimulating, constructive nature could undoubtedly be interpreted as such. When an elderly person goes to a church or mosque they don't think of it as a pensioners' support group, even though they might well benefit from the practical or emotional support of their fellow worshippers.

parents taking a child swimming or to the park don't think of it as a diversion from crime

We could tell two stories about Community Links' Rokeby community centre. We could emphasise its location, in a deprived area with relatively high crime rates, and the almost instantaneous reduction in anti-social behaviour that followed its opening. We could talk about the amount this could save statutory authorities, and illustrate it with the most powerful individual story we can find.

But this isn't the whole story at Rokeby. It's a place to meet friends, to drop off the kids when you need a rest, to play in the games area, learn guitar, set up a new club, go on the internet, or sign up for a group walk. This underpins its success – it's not a service imposed to solve a problem, and going too far down the path of presenting it as such can undermine its effectiveness.

Southwark Circle – another Participle project – can equally tell two stories. To its members it's a social group with the added benefits of being able to trade your skills for those of others. Or it's a solution to Britain's increasingly aging population and the pressure this puts on public services. Both are true. But effective projects tell a positive story.

■ Recognise that problems cut across government silos

An oft-noted weakness of government is that it splits individuals up into their constituent issues

– one department deals with their health, another deals with their education up to 16, another with time at university, another with their job, their tax, their housing, their experience of unemployment or disability, of criminality or being a criminal. But people don't work like this – no-one's health is separate from their housing, or their education separate from their family life.

Joined-up government is undoubtedly hard to achieve on a national level but good early action projects achieve it with individuals – many are deliberately flexible about the means they use to influence the ends. The **Place2Be** are based within schools, working with young children who are struggling in some way, either socially or academically. But the nature of the support is left up to the staff and counsellors – it could involve working with the parents to sort out mental health or welfare benefits problems, letting the child play, supporting more formal learning, or something else entirely. This approach – of working with the whole person and their environment, not just concentrating on a child's reading ability but also their relationship with their parents – cuts across many of the successful projects we looked at.

■ **Have a clear, rich picture of success**

Good projects don't necessarily have a fully worked-through theory of change, but in the minds of those delivering them there is a certain picture of what success looks like. Sometimes it can be well measured, even costed, as with many of the large national programmes such as **Nurse Family Partnerships** or **Sure Start**. But more often, the outcomes measured provide an indication of the direction of travel but not the nuanced picture of success. Is success the young person getting a job, or the young person growing in confidence and skill, expanding their horizons and meeting new people, as they get and then keep a job, and then get a promotion? Whatever can be measured, successful projects have a consistency, a clarity and a certainty about their definition of success and they strive relentlessly to achieve it.

Successful projects work with the whole person and their environment

■ **Work better earlier**

The fundamental message for this report is that acting earlier is better, and that applies as much within a specific project as across society. Several projects we spoke to have told us that with pressure on public sector budgets and cuts to provision, local authorities are trying to commission their programmes later and later, often to replace more intensive 'late action' statutory services. This process of turning good early action programmes into less effective acute responses is a very practical and current risk, particularly since – as we discuss below – the evidence for impact and cost-savings can sometimes be more robust the later you act, even if that impact is smaller.

■ **Still cost money**

Early action might save money overall (see below), and can be considerably cheaper than the acute intervention it heads off, but all the projects we've found require resources upfront; to hire good staff, buy equipment, pay for overheads, reimburse volunteers, produce reports of their work. They are cost-effective but not cost free.

Government neighbourhood initiatives

Over the last 15 years or so, many early action initiatives have been developed through local and central government. Many formal evaluations have taken place but this section considers lessons from the *grass roots experience*, drawing on work by a Task Force member, Professor Anne Power, and her team at the London School of Economics. Over ten years, they interviewed and tracked 200 people living in families in deprived areas and discussed their findings in *Family Futures*.

Balance sheet of progress and impacts of neighbourhood interventions

Outcomes – based on parents' views

Sure Start	✓ with very few criticisms
New Deal for Communities	✓ with some mixed views
Decent Homes	✓ with a lot more to do
Neighbourhood management	✓ but requires long-term commitment to stay in place
Wardens	✓ but need more of them and more frequent patrols
Community policing	✓ but backup needs to be clear
Crime prevention	✓ but fear of crime still high and actual crime still above average in these areas
Safety	✓ but more preventive policing wanted. Still needs tighter control on drugs
Mixed housing development	Some gentrification and some expensive flats but areas remain predominantly low income
Open space	✓ but not enough of it and needs more supervision
Sport	✓ but needs a lot more organisation and lower charges
Schools	✓ but secondary more difficult than primary
Training	✓ but more work experience would help
Youth Provision	✓ many big gaps, definitely the highest priority
Public transport	✓ generally big improvements
Community Activity	✓ when it happened but a lot more needed
Consultation	✓ but most parents don't join in formal consultations – need more 'fun' family friendly approaches
Demolition	✓ Some hope that it might help, when limited in scale, but very negative impacts from large scale demolition
Large scale regeneration	✓ Very slow, creates a lot of uncertainty, very expensive – lower level investments help more
Job Access	✓ local services and programmes often offer openings to parents with low skills, with accompanying training

Note: ✓ signifies positive impact. Text in right hand column explains parents' views.

Drawing on this material and wider LSE analysis, we have been able to identify five further lessons about what has worked and why.

Based on the experience of families supported by a wide range of early action interventions in the three areas studied, many of those area-based initiatives have been highly successful, as shown in the table above, taken from *Family Futures*:

■ Importance of relationships and the interconnection and complexity of problems

Many of the lessons learnt mirror those from the voluntary sector. First, just as ‘deep value’ relationships, for example, are vital for successful initiatives from the civil society, the quality of the relationship and degree of one-on-one contact between people delivering and receiving a service has proved vital to the success of government-led early action, for example at Sure Start centres, Local Housing Offices and School-Home Links. Second, although government initiatives tend to focus on specific issues, problems are often closely connected. Family Futures found, for instance, that there are high levels of depression amongst parents in disadvantaged areas and that there is a relationship between poor health, including poor mental health, poor housing, low unemployment, debt and other social problems.

■ Government acting as an enabler of locally led action

The LSE has found through Family Futures and other work that government involvement in early action can work particularly well where locally-led and locally-delivered initiatives with community involvement have been enabled or supported by government action. ‘Low level’, steady government investment in, for example, neighbourhood renewal programmes, is highly effective in tackling deep-set community problems. Similarly non-financial government assistance to local initiatives such as the creation of regulatory frameworks, have proved valuable in upholding and strengthening on-going work. Without that support it can be hard to get effective action off the ground.

dozens of services dealing with particular problems only spend 14% of their time with those they're supporting

Stories of Success

Participle's Swindon project

Ella is a mother in one of Britain's increasingly infamous ‘troubled families’, living in Swindon; she was abused by her father and then several partners. Her four children are all known to a myriad of local services. Yet after two years as part of Participle's LIFE Programme, she has a new job, new friends, and her children are all back in education.

The project recognises fundamental problems in the current system – that billions of pounds spent on ‘troubled families’ are actually spent on interventions which barely touch their lives. That dozens of local services are all trying to deal with particular problems but those delivering them only spent 14% of their time meeting the individuals they're trying to support. The LIFE programme focuses on the relationship



between family members and staff handpicked by the family themselves.

LIFE, piloted in Swindon, is now in four local authorities in Britain. In 2009, more than £200,000 was saved based on changes already occurring in the same family after 12 weeks of being on the LIFE programme. These savings would build over time as the family disengage from numerous enforcement actions and other consequences of their previous behaviour;

■ The LIFE programme cost is £10,000 per annum per family based on two teams working with 38 families.

■ The right commissioning: flexibility and user involvement

A wide range of social policy literature on how the public sector uses incentives and controls to promote effective public services (known as ‘public sector motivations’) suggests that flexibility and user involvement in the design or delivery of services is likely to provide the greatest capacity to deliver innovative and responsive services which can achieve the goals of early action. In order for good relationships to form, and for community leadership and local initiatives to emerge and be supported by government, a prior requirement is that the culture of the public sector allows this to occur.

■ Using voluntary sector approaches and expertise

Government initiatives, however can suffer from a lack of flexibility in their very nature. The LSE Housing and Communities group have suggested for example that the success of the **About Turn** housing project in Bradford, lies largely in staff personalities and willing commitment to out-of-hours contact and crisis response. They have thus concluded that this kind of approach may only work within a social or charitable framework which stands outside formal bureaucracy. This is not to say that government early action initiatives are in themselves fruitless, but serves to emphasise once more the need for a variety of approaches and cooperation across sectors to achieve the best possible outcomes.

■ There’s a lot more to do, especially to support older children and young people

Parents in all areas studied in *Family Futures* agreed that providing more for children and young people was a very high priority; and this conclusion has also come through in other LSE surveys

Whilst the definitions of ‘good evidence’ may be contested, there is little disagreement around the broad principles of what works

of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Many of those involved in the study thought Sure Start should be extended to older children as a key ‘enabling service.’ As well as receiving a huge endorsement from the families surveyed in *Family Futures*, Sure Start has also been shown to be successful in later formal evaluations, despite mixed results initially.

Primary schools are seen as vital in the way that they build strong links with parents and a sense of community. This creates a network of support and communication so that services can step-in quickly where needed. However, this role is largely lost at secondary school, just at the point when parents can often start to lose control over their children and problems can begin. Children often experience a difficult transition to secondary school, even dropping back in year seven; support at this point might be especially valuable. Parents of children with special needs would particularly appreciate a much better dialogue with secondary schools and more support.

Investment in youth services and low-cost or free activities was a high priority for parents surveyed in *Family Futures*. Many parents felt that there were still too few opportunities for older children in particular to ‘let off steam’, and there was a high level of concern about youth crime and gang culture. Improved job access and training were also much valued by parents, but feedback suggests that more work experience would help to develop readiness.

Building on this experience

Policy makers and politicians often talk about the importance of ‘evidence-based policy’. Whilst the definitions of ‘good evidence’ may be contested – a point we will return to in Section Three – it is clear that there is little disagreement around the broad principles of what works. We turn now to the questions: how might we build on this experience and what’s stopping us at the moment.

Section Three

The barriers and the gaps

THIS SECTION LOOKS AT TWELVE OBSTACLES that are obstructing the development of an early action society.

■ ‘Not enough evidence’

‘There isn’t the evidence to substantiate the rhetoric’. This is the concern most frequently expressed by policy makers and also by commissioners.

We looked at a selection of the evidence the government had commissioned over the last decade or so and found an overwhelming social, financial and economic case for early action in the four important areas of government which we discussed in Section One.

- **Education**, where early action thinking is relatively well-embedded, but there is more to be done;
- **Health**, where over many years there have been attempts to refocus expenditure towards prevention but only a tiny proportion of spending is spent in this area;
- **Environment**, where a radical and controversial attempt is underway to tackle climate change.
- **Criminal justice**, where recent thinking is seeking a fundamental shift towards early action but it is very early days.

Stories of Success

Quids In

Quids In is a quarterly magazine focussing on money advice for people on low incomes, distributed free to over 130,000 readers by housing associations and social landlords. It takes a ‘tabloid’ approach to conveying messages about managing finances.

In a readers’ survey 83% responded that they were ‘very likely’ to act on the advice provided in Quids In.

The quarterly publication is self-sustaining through sales, mainly to social landlords, who

pay a unit cost on a sliding scale. The publishers also facilitate consortium purchases from groups of smaller landlords. Spin-off publications are specially-commissioned, usually for more local audiences. And the publishers have explored advertising, although are careful not to promote products which might conflict with the magazine’s social aim.



■ Some of the recent 'Official' evidence for earlier action

Education, including the early years

The **Field Review** into poverty and life chances: *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults* published in December 2010. Estimated that the public service costs of child poverty, through the consequences of increased health problems, unemployment and criminal activity, were between £10 and £20bn a year.

The **Allen Reviews** of early intervention, *Early Intervention: the Next Steps* published in January 2011 and *Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings* published in July 2011: Presents evaluations of a number of Early Intervention policies to show that they can generate excellent returns on investment, and that overall the Early Intervention approach offers better savings than the alternative approaches of doing nothing at all or continuing with existing policies.

Supporting Families in the Foundation Years, published in July 2011, sets out the government's response to the Field and Allen reviews and its strategy for early years. It accepts the economic and social case for investment and picks up some but not all initiatives from the two reports.

Sir Jim Rose's Review, *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties*, June 2009 made the case for major investment in early action to reduce later problems. It was accepted by both the previous and current governments.

Health

The **Derek Wanless review of 2002**, *Securing our Future Health: Taking the Long Term View* was followed by **Securing Good Health for the Whole Population** in 2004. In addition to the wider social and economic benefits, these reports suggested that around half of then NHS expenditure (£30bn) could be saved through improvements in public health and greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Our Health, Our Care, Our Say, a January 2006 White Paper stated that '*we must re-orientate our health and social care services to focus together on health and health promotion, [with this requiring] a shift in the centre of gravity of spending*' and promised that '*Health and social care services will provide better prevention services with earlier intervention.*'

Healthy Lives, Healthy People: our strategy for public health in England, November 2010. The coalition government has committed to a cross-cutting strategy and to ring-fencing public health expenditure to protect it from other pressures

No Health without Mental Health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages, published in February 2011, states that mental health needs cost England over £105bn each year, with treatment costs expected to double in the next 20 years. It suggests '*radically changing the way that current services are delivered so as to improve quality and reduce costs*', and includes specific early action policy proposals based on evidence of potential savings.

Criminal Justice

The **Breaking the Cycle** Green Paper published in December 2010 identified that the social and economic costs of reoffending by those released from short sentences are between £7 and £10bn a year. It suggested ways that these costs could be reduced and explained that a greater

focus on rehabilitation ‘*should result in fewer crimes being committed overall, stemming the unsustainable rise in the prison population and ultimately achieving a reduction in the amount of money spent on the criminal justice system. There will be more payback to victims and communities and the public will be better served.*’

Published in April 2009, **Lord Bradley’s review** of people with mental health or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system, stressed the need for increased spending to support them. He identified numerous long-term savings to be made through an early action approach with an overall net saving found to be feasible. For example he proposed largely abandoning short sentences for such people, with a focus on a well-supported community sentence, saving up to 2000 prison places and £40m per year.

Environment

The **Stern review**, *The Economics of Climate Change*, October 2006 estimated that the costs of uncontrolled climate change could be over 20% of GDP. Action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the worst effects of climate change, however, could be undertaken at a rate of only 1% of global GDP each year. Stern identified a potential saving of around \$2.5 trillion a year from moving the world onto a low-carbon pathway.

It is worth noting that two of the most influential reports (Stern on climate change and Wanless on health) were commissioned not by the delivery department or even the Cabinet Office but by the Chancellor, emphasising the economic as well as the social significance of their inquiries

■ Confusing the broad economic case and the particular business case

It is not true therefore to say that there is insufficient high-level evidence however it is fair to say that, even where this has been well made, the ‘business case’ for a particular intervention may still be inadequate. Improving children’s levels of literacy, for instance, may well save government money in the long term. That is not the same as claiming that my ‘*reading loudly to children*’ project will improve their literacy and therefore lead to savings. The first is well evidenced the second is not, but the two are often confused.

When considering the case for investment in one project rather than another, precise information on the effectiveness of that specific action and the likely savings are often required. This evaluation is not just important for funders, it is also valuable for any organisation to maintain a clear ‘feedback loop’ of information on what works so that practice can be constantly improved.

■ The real difficulties with business case evidence

Some of the most famous early action projects – for example Nurse Family Partnerships, Chicago Child Parent Centres, Strengthening Families Programme, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Reading Recovery Programme and more – have gone through extensive analysis. Those five have been estimated to save, respectively \$2.88, \$4.82, \$7.82, \$3.28 and £17 for every \$1 (or £1) spent. Yet even amongst the best-studied programmes there is considerable variation in methodology.

Medium sized projects have attempted or paid for their own cost-benefit analyses, with widely varying levels of academic rigour. To take just three examples, Tomorrow’s People evaluated their welfare-to-work projects and found a return of £2.40 for every £1 spent. School Home Support, which places specialist staff in schools to work with troubled young people and their families saves anywhere from £1.24 to £21.12 per £1 spent, depending on which methodology is used. And St Giles Trust saves £10 for every £1 spent on work with prison leavers.

For smaller, often locally-based projects, the burden of rigorous evidence-gathering can be stifling and unrealistic. Although many can provide evidence of outputs and costs, even measuring impact, let alone converting this into a rigorous cost-benefit analysis, can be hard.

The difficulties of measuring or ascribing the long-term impact of larger projects can often hinder progress. Evaluating savings is also a complex business, with a number of potential pitfalls, as set out in the box below.

■ Evaluating savings

An evaluation bias against the earliest action?

The earlier we act, the less evidence we can have for the potential outcomes. Enabling services offer the higher potential rates of return, but as in any investment, higher returns go hand in hand with higher risk. It is easier to measure positive outcomes and financial savings where an impending cost is most visible. The 'business case' assessments therefore run the risk of making prompt interventions seem a more viable investment than enabling services. We have to resist the perverse incentive to invest in prompt interventions, rather than earlier action, as the optimum point of return on investment. Our message is clearly that the earlier action can be taken, the better. The risk inherent within enabling services is well worth taking.

Modelling for the future

The potential savings from early action programmes cannot only be based on their ability to lessen expenditure from current levels. As Graham Allen has pointed out in his recent study *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*, significant cost reductions cannot be achieved in prisons or care homes simply by reducing numbers in existing facilities. Such savings only arise when facilities can be closed altogether. However, current projections suggest we will have to build more in coming years, so eliminating this *need for expansion* must be factored into the potential savings from early action.

Saving sooner as well as later

Early action can deliver both short and long-term savings but projects are often wrongly pigeon-holed into one box or another. Some savings can accrue within the same budgetary cycle even within longer-term 'enabling services'.

In her evidence to the Finance Committee of the Scottish Parliament on this topic, Dr Suzanne Zeedyk presented the example of the **Parents Altogether Lending Support** initiative in Dundee, a six-week programme of classes at a cost of £200 per family which evaluations have shown provide long-term effective parenting skills and support. She estimated that one mother who attended the classes kept her child from being placed into care within the year, representing an unidentified and unmeasured saving to the City Council of at least £129,800 that year.

■ The unreal difficulties with business case evidence

In a workshop organised by the Task Force we identified several other barriers to the collection of good evidence, including a lack of coordination between funders on the data they require organisations to gather, and a reluctance to share data that is obtained. All these things are true and we must get better at gathering and evaluating good business case evidence, but we must also challenge the myth that there is no evidence or that effective preventative work can't be measured.

Too often, we fear, these lines are repeated as an easy way of disregarding an inconvenient truth. Practitioners attending our workshop discussed the difficulty, even once they have good evidence

of convincing decision makers to connect the evidence to the policy. 'Not enough evidence' can be a convenient excuse for an aversion to change.

■ Memory lapse

Institutional memories can be very short. Staff change roles and central and local government are very large. That's why it's important to repeat frequently all that we know including the results of government reviews. It may well have been said before, but many won't have heard.

■ Short-term planning

Short-term planning horizons erect further barriers to the development of earlier action. Investment has high initial costs and savings may accrue in subsequent years, sometimes outside three-year spending plans. These savings may well reduce the deficit over the longer term but the short-term planning horizon obscures the good news.

This phenomenon was noted by the Justice Select Committee in its report of December 2009, *Cutting Crime: the case for justice reinvestment* which said 'Effective crime reduction policies should lead to reduced spending on the prison system and better return on investment in efforts to reduce crime and re-offending over several spending cycles. The Government must therefore develop incentives for longer-term planning nationally, regionally and locally.'

At a time of economic austerity, the pressure to take short-term funding decisions is particularly strong. Many early action interventions, such as Sure Start and youth work, are being cut back as a result of recent reductions in local authority and national budgets. The Confederation of Heads of Young People's Services, for example, have found that over £100m will be removed from the local authorities' budgets for youth services by March 2012.

Stories of Success

Community Links Rokeby Hub

Jude was 19 when he first came into the Rokeby community centre; he remembers the area before the centre was there. 'The green was often used as a base for criminal activities... cars stolen and set alight.'

Jude first attended the youth club, was then recruited as a youth worker, and soon after set up his own dance school, initially based out of the hub and later moving to a studio.



Rokeby is open all day Monday-Saturday. Their programme includes children's play sessions, mother and toddler groups, a youth club, pensioner's group, keep-fit classes, ESOL classes, and community fun days. The outdoor sports area is used most evenings.

Since the Hub's opening in 2009 Rokeby estate has seen a 48% drop in anti-social behaviour and a 56% drop in reported crime, both attributed by the police to the work of the hub. Twelve months after the hub opened, 80% of the local people surveyed said the area had improved for the better. The Hub is used by about 200 people each week

The cost of building the centre was met by a foundation. The running costs have been met variously by the local authority and by a foundation, and will soon be met in part by proceeds from the first East London Bond.

This short-termism also makes it difficult to find new money to invest in new early interventions. Bringing in new investment through Social Impact Bonds or other new financial instruments may be part of the answer, but it is still essential to address the obstacles to investment within government's own planning processes.

■ Misalignment between costs and benefits

Budget silos within and across different government departments and agencies make investment in early action even harder. Early action goals often straddle departmental and budget boundaries and a cut in early action often saves money in one budget but leads to costs in another. Equally, additional early action investment in one budget may only produce savings elsewhere.

Moreover, the extent of spending on early action may be obscured by departmental boundaries, making action to increase or maximize it difficult. Spending that will help reduce offending, for instance, is spread widely across different budgets.

We need new ways of compensating for these structural problems, and of aligning costs and savings.

■ Localism – a mixed blessing.

Localism could be a help or it could be a hindrance. In decentralising funding decisions, and removing ring fences, significant challenges can arise with local authorities if there are not clear incentives or safeguards to prioritise early action. The new Early Intervention Grant, for example, provided to local authorities faces a 21.7% real terms cut by 2014-5 and is not ring fenced.

On the other hand, localism and the decentralisation of financial responsibility for early action services can be used to promote early action as its value can be clearer closer to the ground. Nottingham's recent work to become an 'early intervention city' demonstrates the power of local bodies and networks in taking a proactive approach in line with early action aims. Similarly the recent move by the Scottish and Northern Irish devolved bodies towards a focus on 'preventative spending' have highlighted the key role that local and regional government can play in the prioritisation of early action. Part of the challenge for the future must be to resist the short-term temptations and preserve such local innovation.

■ Gaps in knowledge

In government and elsewhere what counts is often *what* you count. We know how much is being spent on capital investment by government and what its assets are worth. However, we lack information on how much is being spent on prevention and early action as a proportion of total expenditure. This is a major obstacle in arguing the case for earlier action and for treating it, like capital, as a longer term investment.

In Scotland, it has been estimated that 40-45% of public spending is negative (that is, on acute interventions). This provides something of a benchmark. However, in Scotland as elsewhere, there is considerable variation across budgets.

We have been unable to find much precise information for the UK but some general trends can be identified. We know that there has been a major shift towards preventative spending, enabling investment in some areas, for example in the extension of early years education to three- and four-year-olds in the late 1990s and the early part of last decade. Even this story is not straightforward however, as the government's Early Intervention Grant (which includes the funding for early years education, Sure Start, and many

Early action goals often straddle departmental boundaries, a cut in early action saves money in one budget but leads to costs in another

valuable prompt interventions) is now being cut, and its ring fences removed. An IFS study has estimated that it faces a 21.7% real terms cut by 2014-5. (*Trends in education and schools spending*, 2011, Institute for Fiscal Studies).

Department for Education spending generally comprises spending on early action – through education and training – and it rose by 5.1% per year in real terms in the decade from 1999 to 2009. Currently it faces an overall real-terms cut. Despite this, increased provision is now being made for disadvantaged children through the government’s Pupil Premium policy. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has shown that this means deprivation now wholly accounts for whether individual schools experience real-terms increases or decreases in funding. This targeted provision within the education budget is clearly a relative form of prompt intervention. The Pupil Premium currently makes up 1.2% of the DfE resource budget, and is projected to rise to 4.6% by 2014-5.

In areas other than Education, the shift towards earlier action has been much slower, for example the proportion of public health spending as a total of health spending has slowly increased but is still tiny at 4% (£3.7bn in 2006/7). However, within this, only 35% of this early action spending in health was used for enabling services, whilst 65% was spent on prompt interventions – early but not as early as it could be. (*Public Health and Prevention Expenditure*, 2009, Health England).

On climate change, commitments have been made to achieve Carbon Transition Plans, which implies a significant increase in early action expenditure over time. Indeed some progress appears to have been made: wind energy output has risen 120% year-on-year, with hydroelectric output similarly up 75%. Renewable energy sources contributed a record 9.6% of the UK’s energy mix in the second quarter of 2011, and overall CO₂ emissions fell by 9.8% in 2009. However key policies such as the Green Deal, the Green Investment Bank, Green ISAs and the pledge to reform aviation taxes have all been held up, particularly by opposition from the Treasury. This, and the objections of the Transport and Business Secretaries in May 2011 to the new carbon budget proposed by the Committee on Climate Change (supported by the Secretary of State), create the impression that environmental early action is far from being embedded.

Early action is likely to have formed an even lower proportion of expenditure on criminal justice than on health and it is even possible that the proportion has been falling rather than rising over the last decade because of increased investment in prisons as the prison population has grown. Very little is spent on enabling services such as ‘prehabilitation’, and relatively little on rehabilitation services. The need to increase expenditure on early action has been noted for some years. For example, the House of Commons Justice Committee in December 2009 referred to a ‘crisis of sustainability’ in criminal justice spending and called for ‘a national justice reinvestment plan,’ focusing on reinvesting resources spent on prisons into early action to prevent offending. The present government is trying to shift the balance but it is unclear how successful it will be.

Clearly though, despite these broad impressions and select examples, we need a far more comprehensive understanding of how government prioritises early action and where investment is being targeted. In addition to better information on expenditure, improved information on the liabilities being created by failure to invest in early action would increase transparency and bring home the benefit of early action spending in helping to tackle the financial deficit.

As well as better information on government spending, the voluntary sector would also benefit from clearer data on its own early action spending. Health England compiled data on major health charities in 2009 but information in other fields is very patchy.



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■ Boundaries between agencies and between professions.

Early action very often requires co-ordination across a very wide range of groups within and beyond central and local government. However, the many different organisational structures within central and local government and their agencies make this a major challenge. It's not just a question of separate organisational silos but also professional boundaries even within single or related organisations, for example in healthcare. A shared vision and strong leadership can help break down these barriers.

In civil society, the problem is, if anything, worse, as there are 170,000 voluntary sector organisations. Umbrella organisations can help but may be organised around single issues. More capacity to work in a cross-cutting way is needed in both sectors. Again strong and broadminded leadership is particularly important.

■ Unhelpful commissioning

As identified in Section Two, early action works best where there is the flexibility to get to the root of complex problems and the opportunity and time to develop deep value relationships. The voluntary sector is often particularly well placed to carry out this work, as it can have the expertise and long-term commitment required.

early action works best where there is the flexibility to get to the root of complex problems and the time to develop deep-value relationships

However, good ideas can be thwarted by poor commissioning and other funding processes, especially those which lead to a focus on price at the expense of value and are too restrictive about how work should be done. As the government seeks to diversify the delivery of public services through different agencies, it is even more important that commissioning processes create the right incentives for early action.

Early action certainly requires a new focus on long-term outcomes, combined with interim goals – but those outcomes can be counterproductive if they are too narrowly drawn. The evidence from Section Two suggests that the ideal environment for early action may be one in which clear goals are set within a shared vision and maximum flexibility is then given in how to deliver them – the **so-called 'black box' approach**.

■ Payment by results.

The last government placed strong reliance on targets, largely of short-term outputs, which may have created incentives away from early action. The current government is experimenting with payment by results, allowing for greater flexibility in delivery, and local commissioning. Such changes may help to promote an important shift in culture but also need to be implemented carefully. Complex commissioning processes, for example, may have hidden entry costs to voluntary organisations with vital expertise in early action.

Payment by results (PBR) presents particular challenges to voluntary organisations with modest reserves. Long delays in payment and the transfer of risks are major difficulties. It is unlikely, however, that future governments will turn back the clock. Payment by results will be used more and more. Many voluntary agencies may have the expertise to deliver early action programmes, but relatively few as yet have the all the financial skills or resources to thrive in this new environment.

These barriers are not individually insurmountable but they are collectively formidable and account for, at best, the slow rate of progress on the early action agenda. How might they be tackled? We turn now to a set of ideas for clearing the road.

Section Four

What to do now

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, we identified a range of barriers to creating the early action society and a more enabling style of government described in Section One. Lack of funding has limited evaluation and constrained development, lack of development has restricted the number and range of tried and tested programmes, lack of evidence has discouraged funding. These problems have been made worse by the fragmented nature of government and civil society; the misalignment of incentives, poor commissioning processes in government; and lack of transparency about how much the government and others are spending on early action.

We won't break the impasse bit by bit but we think there is the interest, the knowledge and the commitment across the sectors for a step change in several areas with, potentially, significant cumulative impact.

The Task Force has developed a set of initial ideas for discussion and development which we offer as **Advice**. Where we have already made some progress with collaborators we report on **Action underway** and on each idea we indicate the **Next steps**.

To embed a commitment to early action, change is needed at three levels:

- New funding for early action, with clear goals and appropriate incentives.
- Practical tools for both government and civil society to overcome barriers and support change
- Strong leadership and better co-ordination – with a compelling vision and effective alliances delivering it on the ground

The following looks at each in turn.

■ **Sorting expenditure**

The swift and radical switch of resources from acute services to community building and earlier action is impractical, but a steady, incremental migration could be achieved with appropriate transition planning. We need a mechanism for establishing goals and evaluating progress.

A necessary starting point would be an analysis of how much government spends on acute interventions rather than early action, and a clearer understanding of how early action contributes towards value for money and reducing future government liabilities. The prime responsibility for providing this information is the government's and we believe that it cannot carry out its responsibility for delivering value for money without it. However, information is currently patchy at best. So a starting point would be a recognition of the fundamental importance of this information in good financial management.

We think that the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office might also look into the availability of this information in order to establish whether the Government is sufficiently equipped to deliver value for money for the taxpayer.

Our Advice: Develop work on spending classification We will work on identifying how much is spent on early action, how this supports value for money and how an increase would reduce future costs. We need to identify current expenditure and assess the costs of under-investment in terms of future public liabilities. These are the essential baselines for transition planning. This will be a large task so an initial focus might be education, health, the environment and criminal justice, as set out earlier in this report.

> Action underway The Task Force has been discussing this inside and outside government.

> Next Steps To work with the government on taking forward analysis. The Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office might also consider whether sufficient financial information is currently available to allow the government to carry out its responsibility for delivering value for money.

■ Planning transition

Once we have greater transparency about how funds are being spent, we think it would be desirable for both government and other funders to set incremental targets for increasing the proportion of spending on early action and to publish Early Action Transition plans. Carbon Transition Plans offer some guidance for the model. These established broad central aims, such as lowering UK carbon emissions by 18% (on 2008 levels) by 2020, with some more specific policy proposals then agreed by individual departments who were each required to formulate their own plans. The plans are having some success though, as noted in Section Three, they are not yet fully embedded. Transition plans of this kind are not necessarily indicative of a whole-hearted change of approach throughout Whitehall but they are a powerful device for fixing on a big goal and for being publicly accountable for the outcomes.

The model of centrally defined aims, with various ‘transition plans’ working towards achieving them appears to be a useful way of focusing attention and making departments – and possibly local authorities and other agencies – accountable for their performance.

Our Advice: Early Action Transition Plans across government Government departments and local authorities should establish and publish Early Action Transition Plans with Early Action Milestones visibly charting progress on Early Action Scorecards. For example, *‘We spend 5% of our budget on prevention and early action. We aim to increase that proportion by 5% each year for the next three years.’*

> Next Steps To identify and take forward within, perhaps, the four areas of government spending which are suggesting for other purposes. We don’t have fixed views about process or structure but believe that we are unlikely to make sustained progress on earlier action without a commitment to transition planning, to the setting of objectives and to the measurement of progress.

The focus of many in arguing for early action is both social and financial, particularly in relation to potential savings. What is less clearly appreciated is the value of early action in securing fiscal sustainability by reducing long term liabilities and by raising more from taxation through increased employability. There can also be a significant contribution toward wider economic growth. There is an opportunity to recognise this through the work of the newly established Office of Budget Responsibility. They should be encouraged to consider the impact of early action – or the lack of it – on long-term financial sustainability as part of its Fiscal Sustainability Report as well as on its wider economic growth forecasts. More widely still, early action contributes to measures of wellbeing. We would like to explore this further with the Office of National Statistics.

Our Advice: Link planning to forecasts and measurement Transition Planning should be linked to the Office of Budget Responsibility's consideration of fiscal sustainability and growth forecasts, and Office of National Statistics measures of wellbeing. Earlier action contributes to fiscal sustainability and growth, but work is needed to understand and reflect the impact. The OBR should be encouraged to consider the impact of early action in its growth forecasts and in its Fiscal Sustainability Report. Early action also has an impact on wellbeing and we need to explore how this might be captured by the ONS when measuring wellbeing.

> Next Steps To explore the options with the OBR, ONS and ministers and officials.

We should seek to apply the same disciplines to agencies outside government as well as within. Many third-sector agencies are proud of their record on developing innovative solutions and on tackling causes. However, few systematically analyse their expenditure and review their work programmes with the intention of sustaining and accelerating a transition from acute services to early action. Hence, progress is piecemeal and 'stop start.' We need more considered analysis, more challenge, more incentives and more transparency. Transition Plans should be as essential and as visible as the audited accounts and – like equal opportunity or health and safety policies – judged on the *evidence* of implementation.

Charitable trusts give away between £2.5bn and £3bn every year and have more than £80bn under management. The Big Lottery alone will be spending £1bn over the next three years and Francis Maude has recently stated that *'as much as 25%' of public service contracts will in future go to SMEs and the third sector'*. These are large sums. Significant power and influence rests with funders who could incentivise and sustain the transition in the independent sector with milestones of their own and have similar expectations of those they fund – community groups, social enterprises, businesses and charities, large and small.

It is becoming increasingly common for major funders to ask applicants for evidence of their environmental policies. This is driving awareness and behavioural change across the sector with a ripple effect well beyond. There is an opportunity to do something similar around earlier action.

Our Advice: Early Action Transition Plans across the third sector Third sector funders could lead the development of a new 'one step sooner' mindset, challenging themselves and those they fund to consider the optimum point for any given intervention, and to justify their choice, asking of every service 'Is this at the right time?' and, if not, 'how might we next engage one step sooner?'

This effort could be guided by published Transition Plans and Milestones by the funder: *'We invest 15% of our grants on early action. We aim to increase that proportion by 8% each year for the next three years.'* And for the funded: *'We spend 10% of our income on prevention and early action. We aim to increase that proportion by 10% each year for the next three years.'*

> Next Steps The Task Force is consulting with funders and funded on ways of developing these ideas in the third sector. Again, we think transition plans are very important but so is flexibility. We are keen to work with others on exploring how this might be achieved.

■ Paying for earlier action

A government-wide transition towards earlier action would only be achievable if it was underpinned by different incentives in Treasury spending rules. We offer these initial ideas which we are discussing with the Treasury and other colleagues.

Recent announcements on credit easing policy suggest that the Treasury is interested in new ways of protecting/increasing investment despite the overall squeeze on current spending. Radically, classifying early action as an investment wherever the savings can be quantified would more accurately reflect its actual function and open up new opportunities for growth. If such a change is too difficult in the immediate future, 'ring fencing' might be used to protect early action spending from short-term pressure, much as the current government now intends to 'ring fence' the public health budget from other health spending, and so prevent it from being cut back by short-term pressures.

Our Advice: Special treatment of early action spending within Departmental Expenditure Limits

To help recognise early action as an investment, special treatment of early action spending within Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) should be considered. For example, it might be treated like capital spending, with costs spread across the period in which savings are realised. Alternatively, early action spending might be 'ring fenced' within DEL to protect it from short term cuts.

> Next Steps The Task Force is exploring these issues with officials and helping to develop further thinking about the practicalities of implementation.

To help counterbalance the tendency for short-term funding pressures to crowd out longer term investment, a centrally held **Early Action Fund** might be considered comparable, perhaps, to the £70m NHS Change Fund in Scotland. It might be financed by top-slicing departments' Departmental Expenditure Limits, by a 'Polluter Pays' levy on industries such as alcohol and gambling, or by a windfall tax similar to that which raised £5bn for, amongst other things, initial funding of the New Deal for Work programme. This use was rationalised by the Chancellor at the time as being to 'equip Britain for our long-term future' and to 'modernise the welfare state', so establishing the precedent for the use of such windfalls on 'investment in the future'.

Of course the government has changed since 1997 and political priorities are now very different. Both the Chancellor and his shadow (in his 2011 Conference speech) have committed to using any new windfall gains to repay the national debt but these are rapidly changing times. The Chancellor's recent commitment to credit easing is a response to circumstances, not an ideological choice. Similarly a windfall investment in earlier action might be considered now as a pragmatic way of reducing public expenditure, supporting growth and, especially, offsetting future liabilities.

Imminent opportunities include the Northern Rock privatisation, set to occur within the year and expected to raise approximately £1bn, further nationalised bank sell-offs (OBR put an indicative £3.4bn price tag on Lloyds and RBS in March 2011) and the sale of 4G mobile communication licences which is likely to raise between £2bn and £4bn at the end of 2012.

Short Story of Success

Southwark Circle

Southwark Circle is a membership group, targeted at over 50s, offering cheap practical help and bringing people together. It aims to combat the isolation and lack of practical support elderly people told Participle – its founders – were most damaging in their lives.

Members pay £10 or £20 per year, and have access to a wide range of social events

organised by staff and other members. They can also buy £10 vouchers to exchange for small tasks, anything from computer lessons to help planting an apple tree. These are carried out by 'helpers' from the community – who can choose to be paid the London living wage or volunteer their time.

Southwark Circle has over 800 members, and with initial funding from Southwark council is on track to be self-sustaining after 3 years.

Some funds might also be identified from existing Departmental budgets. For example, the House of Commons Justice Committee report in December 2009, *Cutting Crime: the case of justice reinvestment* called for a ‘national justice reinvestment fund’ to reduce crime, using resources that had been previously allocated to building new prisons, as well as some funding from other government departments with an interest. It proposed that the new fund be deployed as match funding encouraging local partnerships and helping to develop Social Impact Bonds.

Our Advice: An Early Action Fund A fund held initially by the Treasury and allocated to departments as an additional element of their agreed budgets where an early action investment case has been made. It might be financed by top-slicing departments’ DEL, by a ‘Polluter Pays’ levy, by a government windfall or by a combination of all three. Radically, any Early Action Fund might be held outside government and give funds to government, voluntary or private organisations.

> Next Steps The Task Force is discussing these suggestions inside and outside government. We recognise that they are ambitious but are the kind of bold initiative that would demonstrate serious, top level commitment and stimulate further action in other places.

Many of the projects that we have looked at deal, at least in part, with problems that have been caused by, or at least compounded by, government activity. Research in Nottingham, for instance, revealed that 42% of the capacity of legal advice agencies in the city is taken up with work generated by mistakes or systems failure in organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions. This means that the funding supporting advice agencies (from, for example the Legal Aid budget or Local Authority contracts) is paying for errors in other departments. The research suggested that the capacity of those advice services could be increased by a commensurate amount if these external agencies were not causing this demand.

Because budgets are fragmented, departments are often unaware of the costs they are creating in other parts of government or elsewhere. Government’s role must not be confined to funding early solutions but also to identifying the points where it contributes to the problem. Here we need a mechanism that records these mistakes, feeds them back to their source and creates an incentive to correct them.

Our Advice: Responsibility charging Ministers should consider how different parts of government generate demand for resources from another part of government and should introduce ways of creating sufficient incentives for these departments to reduce this demand and so prevent the need for this later expenditure. This might take the form of a ‘responsibility charge’ effectively requiring government agencies to pay for clearing up its own mistakes. Applying the ‘Polluter Pays’ principle across government would increase the capacity of the service dealing with the mistakes and also act as an economic incentive for the department creating this demand to address the causes.

> Action Underway Baring Foundation has commissioned Frontier Economics to carry out a feasibility study on applying ‘Polluter Pays’ and ‘cost to trade’ mechanisms to legal aid. They are looking across government at the spectrum of measures that are used to create incentives on one department not to generate demand for resources provided by another department – from joint objectives to strict polluter ‘taxes’.

> Next Steps We will be reviewing how these mechanisms could all be used more widely to encourage earlier action by one department that would prevent later expenditure in another department. We will report on the progress of this work in our next report.

Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) are, potentially, a useful source of transition funding but as yet the instrument has only been used on one programme and the market is still largely untested. Some public credit easing for investment in SIBs and similar instruments (say through guarantees or insurance) would make them more attractive for mainstream finance. It would sit comfortably alongside other Treasury policies at the moment and it would show vision and leadership.

Our Advice: Public credit easing for investment in Social Investment Bonds

Guarantees or insurances would help to stimulate the market and, most important, would demonstrate ministerial belief in earlier action as a sound and progressive economic policy – a very important signal.

> Next Steps We are consulting on the viability of this idea.

■ Sharing and training

All funders of early action want to commission services and award funds effectively and efficiently, evaluating success and constantly improving. It is necessary to get the incentives right to deliver the right outcome, whilst ensuring proper accountability for the use of funds and allowing the flexibility for knowledgeable and experienced practitioners to develop the relationships that we know from the case studies often work best. There are real challenges: for example, specifying the right outcome, measuring whether it has been achieved and ensuring that there is a good ‘feedback loop’. Without care, processes can be excessively burdensome, especially for small voluntary sector providers.

Section Three described the challenges that exist, especially for smaller organisations, in evaluating their success. The problem is made worse by a different approach to evaluation by different funders. We are therefore seeking to develop common core evaluation to help to build a much stronger evidence base for future investment as well as to reduce bureaucracy for providers.

> Action Underway: Common core funding evaluation The Task Force has been drawing together some of the biggest statutory and independent funders to consider what sound evidence looks like and to develop a new consistent approach to gathering it. We are exploring the feasibility of a ‘common core’ built into funders’ monitoring alongside significant support for building the capacity of funded agencies to self evaluate. Common core evaluation would ensure that data is gathered in a consistent format, that small samples could be realistically aggregated or compared and that, over time, we could accumulate the mass of evidence that is needed to draw convincing conclusions.

> Next Steps We are developing these ideas with a small group of interested partners. Ultimately we would hope to be able to invite all local, national, statutory, independent, large and small-scale funders into this collaborative attempt to learn from the mass of early action initiatives and to build on knowledge that is currently scattered and underused.

Some of the lessons captured in Section Two might offer a useful starting point for further collaboration between funders. We know, from the examples of best practice for instance, the limitations of commissioning for transactions not relationships, or for cost not value or for a short term cycle. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) *Best Value Statutory Guidance* published in September 2011 is a useful tool, not least in reaffirming the importance of value – ‘*having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness*’. The Guidance note should be shared across government and beyond and it should be developed. There is much to learn from what works and much more that could be helpfully shared without compromising the independent judgment of individual agencies or commissioners.

Our Advice: Share commissioning expertise to develop practices that support early action

We think greater sharing of techniques for commissioning services or making grants would be helpful across government, charitable trusts and other social funders. Private sector funders have considerable experience in specifying outcomes and monitoring delivery over long timescales, for example. Charitable foundations often make grants that support innovative ideas. There is considerable scope for commissioners across central and local government to share knowledge and learn from their mistakes as well as to learn from other sectors. A small cross-sector working group might be established to look at the commissioning challenges and make recommendations for improving consistency between agencies and spreading practice. It should include some end-users as well as practitioners.

> Next Steps We are convening a cross-sector group of funders to explore options for sharing and developing experience and expertise in commissioning.

Section Three described Action Underway by the Task Force to develop a gallery of case studies to help share good practice and knowledge between providers. www.community-links.org/earlyaction

In addition to this, many third sector agencies are likely to need help in moving their services further upstream and in building their capacity to deliver. We think there is a need for ‘one step sooner’ training enabling organisations to examine what they do, build the ‘one step sooner’ mindset and capacity and gradually develop practical ideas for earlier action.

Services may need to expand rapidly to deliver this vision. We don’t think that the expansion of individual organisations is necessarily the best way to do it. Rapid growth risks damaging the characteristics of the programme that made it successful in the first place. Systems however can expand faster and further than individual agencies. We should consider instead the application of ‘networked delivery’ – the process of developing service webs or chains where small and medium-sized enterprises connect services in a single offering which is seamless to the recipient, but actually delivered by a network of agencies adopting common protocols.

there is a need for ‘one step sooner’ training, enabling organisations to build the ‘one step sooner’ mindset

Action Underway: Training in developing services one step sooner and in networked delivery

We have been working up options on materials for remote learning and for group training on networked delivery and on engaging one step sooner.

> Next Steps We are discussing with funders the development of pilot training packages including work books and online materials as well as face to face training.

Leaders and partners

Joined-up government is an overworked cliché, but integrated budgeting and delivery at a local level matter to early action for two reasons.

First, because of the frequent misalignment of incentives between the department or agency that traditionally delivers a service and the department or agency that benefits from its success. Integrating budgets and aligning costs and savings would incentivise early action that is, at best, unrewarded, at worst, a liability.

Second, because, as we noted in Section Two, the best early action projects recognise that, for instance, a child’s educational attainment cannot be entirely separated from their health, housing

or family circumstances. A holistic approach is most likely to reduce long-term dependency on expensive specialist remedial services.

In July 1997 Tony Blair speech made his first major speech as Prime Minister on the Aylesbury estate in London. 'Government' he said *'has to learn to work more coherently. In every poor housing estate you can encounter literally dozens of public agencies... all often doing good work, but all often working at cross-purposes or without adequate communication. This matters because it leads to poor policy and wasted resources, like schools excluding pupils who then become a huge burden for the police. Our challenge must be to overcome these barriers, liberating funds from their departmental silos so that they can be used to deliver the best results ... This will mean making sure that budgets are directed to measurable outcomes, not just to doing things because that's the way they've always been done.'*

The Total Place programme first animated the Prime Minister's intentions, morphing eventually into the present government's work on Community Budgets and, most recently into Local Integrated Services and Neighbourhood Budgets, but progress has been slow and patchy. Fourteen years on, pooled budgets and collaborative working are still the sparky new ideas in Whitehall and still the exception on the ground.

Without stronger leadership, localism will stop on the steps of the Town Hall

We think that these programmes have been a useful encouragement for those who were already inclined to think in these ways but have, in practise, allowed local authorities and other public agencies to do very little that they couldn't do already. It's not, for the most part, the rules but custom and practice, institutional culture and personal fiefdoms that have been getting in the way.

The Localism Agenda has been a high priority for the current government, but if it is to mean involving more citizens in decision making, allowing local providers, statutory and voluntary, to pool resources and deliver the best service for their neighbourhood then, paradoxical though it may seem, the aspiration must have national direction. Stepping back, removing targets and relaxing constraints doesn't mean that unwilling local authorities will necessarily do anything that they haven't done before or involve anybody else in doing it. Without stronger leadership, localism will

Stories of Success

Quaker Social Action's Made of Money project

Quaker Social Action's family 'blind jaffa cake' testing is not normally part of a financial inclusion course. But the organisation realised that for many families, financial problems stem from pressure within families rather than lack of knowledge.

The **Made of Money** project provides financial literacy for about 200 families a year. It recognises that supporting families to communicate and share their hopes and fears

about money and spending (whether to buy own-brand or non-branded jaffa cakes, for example) is vital.



This project runs small group sessions with parents and children, which improve family communication, confidence and skills about money, and reduce stress and arguments.

It costs £1,025 per family for 10 hours of support. The project also trains other organisations to deliver the same approach for their own beneficiaries.

stop on the steps of the Town Hall. Requiring councils to work with local partners would generate the changes that successive governments have sought and some leading authorities have made but many more have not.

Our Advice: Establish a Duty to Collaborate and with a matching Right to Lead

This would require local authorities to demonstrate local progress on involving partners in the integration of budgets and in working together. Other local service providers would have the right to lead such collaboration and require the cooperation of the local authority if the council fails to step up.

> Next Steps We will be consulting on the principles behind these mechanisms and on how they might be developed. We will report further in our next report.

Incentives could be strengthened for co-operation across institutional boundaries and budgets though a new approach to the ‘profit’ sharing of any savings that result from earlier action.

In this approach, these savings would be identified in advance and an advance agreement reached on how they would be distributed once realised and based on the scale of the initial contribution.

Our Advice: Early Action Profit Sharing scheme

To deal with the problem of many departments and agencies benefiting from early action and none being prepared to finance it alone, a new early action profit sharing scheme could be introduced for departments and organisations who benefit. They might all invest an agreed share in early action, and when savings are realised these might be shared on an agreed formula. In some cases, this might be combined with private investment through Social Impact Bonds.

> Next Steps Again, we will be consulting on how this mechanism might be implemented and will report further in our next report.

Tony Blair also spoke on the same occasion about early action and his fear of *‘the double jeopardy – worsening social problems and escalating tax bills... Government must not fall into the trap of short-termism... we know that many problems in later life stem from problems in the family, from poor parenting and lack of support. We know that if a child is aggressive and out of control, it is better to help them when they are six than when they have become a criminal at 16. We know that if a young teenager is dropping out of school it is better to bring them back into education now, than to wait for them to be unemployable in five years time.’*

Clearly the principles have been discussed for years. We are reminded of the remark of Derek Wanless quoted in Section One *‘much (has been) written often covering similar ground... but rigorous implementation of identified solutions has often been sadly lacking.’*

Grabbing hold of these ideas is one thing. Not letting go is quite another. In part this means championing practical innovations of the sort that we are suggesting elsewhere in this section. In part it means ministers sharing the aspiration and restating the vision boldly, emphatically and repeatedly.

Over-estimating what can be done in the short run and understating what can be achieved in the long term is a criticism that is often levelled at politicians. Nowhere is this more true than on the early action agenda. These ideas are potentially transformational but only if the commitment is deep and prolonged.

if a child is aggressive and out of control, it is better to help them when they are six than when they have become a criminal at 16.

Tony Blair speech London July 1997

Our Advice: Political leadership To improve co-ordination as well as to exercise leadership, we think the government should adopt one or more of the following: a new ministerial committee chaired by the PM, a Minister for Early Action, an Early Action Czar or an Early Action Unit, focusing not on a single issue but charged with driving earlier action across the full range of government interests.

Over the last year Department for Communities and Local Government officials have been required to ask of every initiative ‘how does this promote localism?’ and ‘how does this give power to citizens?’ Suppose policy makers in every government department and in delivery agency locally and nationally were now empowered with a similar mantra and expected to ask of every service, ‘Is this at the right time?’ And, if not ‘how might we next engage one step sooner?’

> Next Steps We will be sharing these suggestions and the thinking behind them over the next six months.

As well as leadership within government, we think that Committees of the Houses of Parliament also have a critical role in promoting early action as a means of achieving value for money, in helping to identify and tackle the barriers to effective implementation and in advising on best practice.

Indeed, the Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee has played a critical leadership role in Scotland, helping to put early action at the heart of the Scottish government’s agenda as a key way of delivering better services and wellbeing and better value for money. The Committee structure is rather different in the House of Commons but the nearest equivalent is probably the Public Accounts Committee, which has a responsibility for ensuring value for money as well as efficiency and propriety in the use of public money. Other Committees, for example, the Treasury Committee, might also have a role.

Our Advice: Parliamentary leadership We think there is scope for the Public Accounts Committee to undertake an enquiry into how effectively early action is being deployed to achieve value for money, possibly as a cross-cutting study across a number of key areas. The National Audit Office has already partially investigated early action in a number of recent value for money studies on public health, youth justice and renewable energy; any future studies could build on these. Other Committees have also undertaken studies in this area and should be encouraged to do more.

> Next Steps We will be discussing these ideas with the relevant Committees over the next six months.

Early action is not just about public services delivered by government. We need similar leadership in civil society. Hilary Cottam from Participle has pointed out that, ‘*When the Treasury says that a family like Ella’s ‘costs’ a quarter of a million a year, it turns out that what they really mean is that the system around Ella costs a quarter of a million a year, because not one penny of this money actually touches Ella and her family in a way which supports change.*’

In other words, part of the economic argument derives from the fact that, often and in many areas, when ministers or councillors say that they are spending millions on chaotic families they actually mean that they are spending millions on the wrong interventions. Participle, and a number of other projects featured through out this report, get better results with some of the approaches discussed in Section Three.

The third sector has pioneered lots of small-scale prompt interventions but these are still, very largely, outside of the mainstream. We see a particularly important leadership role for independent

funders such as The Big Lottery, charitable trusts and corporate donors in helping to build and mainstream earlier action. These funders generally take a wide, strategic view of social issues. They tend to have much longer term horizons than government and have greater freedom to innovate. This makes them potential champions for early action and for transition planning. There is an opportunity to focus funding in this area, to raise levels of understanding and expertise and also, most importantly, to shift the terms and the tone of discussion

Our Advice: Leadership by independent funders Each will have its own priorities and interests but independent funders should work together on promoting and supporting earlier action and on using their resources to help co-ordinate action and share lessons.

> Action Underway Greater co-ordination and sharing is a first step which we are starting to facilitate. The Big Lottery and the Barrow Cadbury Trust are already taking a leadership role by supporting the work of the Early Action Task Force.

> Next Steps We are exploring with partners the possibility of some form of funders' coalition beneath the umbrella of a wider Early Action Alliance (see below).

■ Looking forward

Over the last six months the Early Action Task Force has been bringing together people and organisations to work collaboratively on developing and promoting the ideas and on improving and expanding the work. We have been impressed by the level of enthusiasm for fundamental change driven partly by the vision, and the logic, of a better way of doing things and partly by an unprecedented barrage of current forces starting with the shifts in the global economy, public expenditure cuts and the rebalancing of the job market, taking in political priorities like localism and public sector reform and made most immediate by the summer riots.

Despite the uncertainty the Task Force has seen grounds for optimism.

More is happening than may be immediately apparent Government reports, of which there have been many on this territory, attract attention and projects which have flourished under the radar for many years can sometimes look novel. In fact there is a lot going on and has been for years albeit, most often, in local initiatives outside the mainstream. There is plenty to build on.

Much is known about the ingredients of success The knowledge isn't distributed as it should be, most of the most successful initiatives are relatively small scale and hard evidence may still be inadequate but common lessons are emerging and there is much to share.

The case is half made Wherever we go we've found that the high level argument is rarely questioned. It is the business case for specific interventions that is more often contested. Even here data exists but of variable quality. We need to move on from a sterile argument about whether or not the evidence exists and develop the common core evaluation that would yield material of an incontestable quality. We know what is needed to complete the case.

New funding opportunities are beginning to emerge New instruments and new programmes are beginning to emerge for financing earlier action – the Social Impact Bond, Big Society Capital, increased public service contracting, and several new funds created by independent funders to name a few. These funding sources are not without their challenges and much more finance is

spending millions on chaotic families actually means spending millions on the wrong interventions

Hilary Cottam, Participle

needed, not least to replace public sector cuts, but in the medium to long-term new opportunities are emerging.

New attitudes but not new legislation A gradual and sustained transition towards a society that is ready for everything needs new attitudes and new behaviours. Above all, it needs strong leadership but it doesn't, for the most part, need legislation.

We don't underestimate the obstacles, but change creates openings for new ideas and approaches and this feels like a timely moment. We have lit many fires. Not all will catch hold, but so far we have begun conversations with funders about common core evaluation, about the translation of policy and learning into practice and development, and about possible alliances. We have talked to and about commissioners sharing the learning, and spoken with business leaders interested in the future shape and substance of the 'enabling company'. From our work on gathering case studies we have identified interest in a more interactive relationship with practitioners and several cross-sector conversations have led to a discussion about the need and the potential for some joint promotional activity.

Meetings and organisational structures are a means to an end, not an end in themselves and we recommend more with due caution. However, as activity is developed on the ground we build also the knowledge and the capacity for moving to another level. It is not helpful to reinvent the wheel and it is not sufficient for scattered voices to argue the economic, moral and social case without also expanding the political space and developing the public demand for a shift to early action. We think the time has come for a broadly based coalition to exploit the gathering momentum.

■ **Action Underway: Raising the game**

We are consulting on some ideas around an Early Action Alliance similar perhaps to the Age Action Alliance. It would be committed to:

- **Changing the aspiration – to be ready for everything.**
- **Understanding what works – gathering 'good evidence'.**
- **Sharing the learning – developing practitioners, funders, commissioners.**
- **Challenging the barriers – structural, systemic and cultural.**
- **Spreading the word – Thriving lives. Costing Less. Contributing More.**

> **Next Steps**

To shape, in response to consultation, a cross-sector alliance. The alliance would be a framework within which other threads of activity could develop and connect. From the conversations so far initial threads might include:

- **Collaborative work on commissioning.**
- **Supporting the development of common core evaluation.**
- **Supporting government in the development of Value For Money audits and transition plans.**
- **Leading a series of 'What's the Problem' conversations with business.**
- **Building a practitioners' network.**
- **Developing a 'voice' for early action – explaining and advocating.**

Section Five

Can it be done?

OUR ASPIRATIONS ARE AMBITIOUS but Scotland shows what can be done. During the period in which the Task Force has been meeting, MSPs and civil society partners have been pursuing a similar agenda, resulting most recently in a draft budget published on September 21st 2011. This included a £500m increase in preventative spending despite a 9.2% reduction in cash from Whitehall.

The Finance Committee of the Scottish Parliament carried out an inquiry and produced a report on the question of *'how public spending can best be focused over the longer term on trying to prevent, rather than deal with, negative social outcomes'*. The report, which was published in January 2011, concluded: *'the current, reactive approach to public spending is unsustainable and that there must be a shift away from reacting to crises to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention'*.

...a £500m increase in preventative spending despite a 9.2% reduction in cash from Whitehall

The Committee argued that Scotland faces some particularly deep and entrenched social problems, so has great incentives for taking action to find cheaper and more effective solutions. A significant piece of evidence cited by the Scotland's Futures Forum was that as much as 40-45% of Scotland's public spending was 'negative', short-term spending to address pre-existing social problems.

The report identified various barriers to the wider realisation of early action, which closely parallel the Task Force's own findings. We both recognise for example, the evidence problem with preventative policy and proving cause and effect, despite many convincing case studies and the clear common-sense case. The Scottish government, in its submission to the Committee, called for robust appraisal and impact assessment of policy options as a means of overcoming this, and said that it was considering the development of a *'single, coherent impact assessment'*.

Like the Task Force, the Finance Committee has highlighted the lack of a transition model which would allow reactive services to be maintained alongside increased investment in prevention in the short to medium term, especially challenging in this time of austerity. Nevertheless, a £70m 'change fund' was introduced into the 2011-12 NHS budget for NHS Boards and partner local authorities to redesign services to help move away from acute care and towards primary and community care.

A lack of collaboration and coordination between public sector bodies was felt to be a significant obstacle, exacerbated by a public sector culture which attempts to manage problems rather than tackle their root causes, and which fails to engage with people, but does things to them. The Committee pointed to the development of one potential model for better coordinating early action under development at the moment. The 'integrated resource framework' for use between NHS

Boards, Local Authorities and other local partners, allows robust evidence about resource allocation to be gathered. This makes for greater clarity and effectiveness in pooling local budgets, and should result in improved outcomes from a more effective, more joined-up service.

The Committee found it *'striking'* that despite unanimous views in the consultation that preventative spending is the best way to eradicate or ameliorate social problems, there was also near unanimity that its full potential was not being realised. The Scottish government itself admitted in its own submission that the current balance of spending was skewed too far towards reaction rather than prevention.

The Finance Committee's suggestion of the need for *'radical overhaul'* of the public services has been reflected in the June 2011 report of the Christie Commission on the future delivery of Scottish public services. It argues that ever-increasing demands on the public services – even without budget cuts – would necessitate a comprehensive shift towards an early action approach. It recommends a shift to preventative services as one of its four main principles for the future delivery of public services, and suggests widening the use of 'change funds' to help facilitate the transfer from acute to preventative services.

preventative spending
is the best way to
eradicate or ameliorate
social problems

The £500m additional preventative spending over three years announced in the 2012-3 draft budget, represents 0.5% of the total projected Scottish government spending for that period. This funding is being supplemented by a levy which, using the 'Polluter Pays' principle, is to be placed on large retailers of tobacco and alcohol, and is projected to raise £110m. These new resources join a separate £6.8m Early Years Early Action fund established in March 2011.

Stories of Success

School Home Support

Leo is a single parent with three boys, and suffers from depression. The School Home Support practitioner at his sons' school helped persuade the council to move Leo from his damp and badly-maintained house far from school to a much better one near the school gates. This meant his sons weren't missing school due to bad health or transport difficulties, and their grades improved.

School Home Support places specialist staff in schools, to work with young people and families to who are struggling with behaviour, attendance or achievement to help them make the best of their education. SHS provided services to 20,000 children and families in 2009/10. They worked in 700 schools in 23 local authorities, mostly in London, and with 150 SHS

practitioners offering intensive support in 220 of these schools.



School Home Support work closely with the family as well as the young person, and have been shown to reduce truancy and permanent exclusions, increase attainment, improve behaviour, lead to greater parental involvement, and is enthusiastically supported by head teachers and school staff.

The cost of a permanent exclusion has been estimated at £63,000, and one report estimated School Home Support saved £1.24 for every £1 spent just through its impact on preventing exclusion. A separate report suggested that in total SHS saved society £21.14 for every £1 spent.

The Scottish government's delivery plan for early action in Scotland also reflects many of the themes in this report. Community Planning Partnerships, which are broadly equivalent to English Local Strategic Partnerships, are seen as vital to the integration and delivery of preventative services. The importance of working across silos and between sectors is to be recognised in the new funding packages for early action, and the Finance Secretary has announced that some of it *'will only be available for joint-working across institutional boundaries and sectors'*.

The previous Finance Committee's work has been extended by its post-election successor, which has conducted a further consultation prior to the publication of the draft budget. Responses to this again emphasised the challenges of prioritising resources, the necessity for better evaluation procedures and the need for more collaborative working. And they concluded, as we have done, with the need for national leadership in ensuring successful prevention policy and in particular government involvement in the dissemination of evidence and best practice. In its scrutiny of the draft budget, the new Committee has agreed to focus on the extent to which the government is encouraging a more preventative approach to public spending, and how this new approach is being implemented across key agencies and partners. Its report is due in December 2011.

The sooner the better

We began this report with the question that we have been asking ourselves *'How do we build a society that prevents problems from occurring rather than one that copes with the consequences'*.

We don't underestimate the challenge but colleagues in Scotland have set us an inspiring example. The transition planning approach which we have proposed is not rapid or revolutionary but if Tony Blair had gone one step further in his 1997 speech and committed to transition targets of just 2% a year the UK would look very different today. Thriving lives. Costing Less. Contributing More. The earlier we start, the sooner we transform.

Where will we be in another 14 years? And what must we do now to ensure that, by then, the whole of the UK is benefiting from the triple dividend?

We will start our second report with these questions in May 2012.



■ JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Do please join the conversation over the next six months – the sooner the better – and help us with more of the answers.

Email David.Robinson@Community-Links.org

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About Community Links

COMMUNITY LINKS IS A SOCIAL ACTION CHARITY

in east London working with more than 25,000 people every year. Early action – building a fence at the top of the cliff rather than running an ambulance at the bottom – has been at the heart of our strategy for 35 years.

Our national research and policy work – such as The Early Action Task Force – is rooted in the knowledge gained through a wide range of practical projects and services delivered locally, offering support to all age groups and across a wide range of issues. Most of our projects are delivered in Newham, one of the poorest boroughs in Europe. Our projects respond to local needs, have been developed with local communities and are delivered by staff that live locally, many of whom are former users of our services.

We pioneer new ideas and ways of working locally and share the learning nationally with other practitioners and policymakers.

Find out more at www.community-links.org



Community
Links' base in
east London

Consultancy Services

Our consultancy services and approaches are grounded in our community-based projects in east London. We share our learning by providing practitioner-led research and evaluation, organisational development, community engagement, and bespoke skills training services.

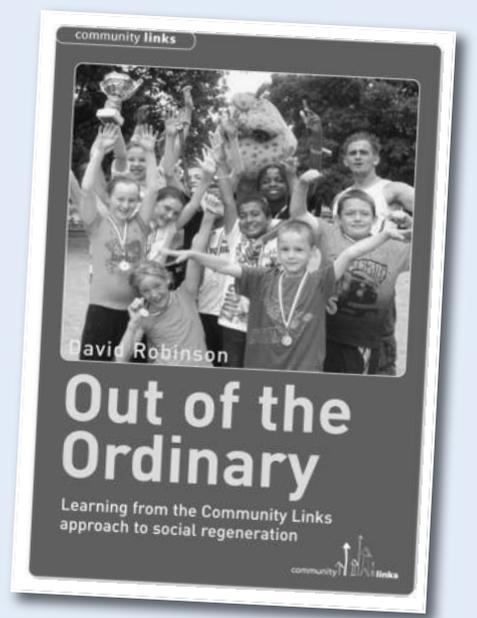
We help communities achieve their own potential through capacity building, knowledge development, and community engagement. We share our expertise, experience, and network through a participatory skills-building approach so that we leave behind an enabled and self sustaining community.

Out of the Ordinary

This short study by Community Links founder David Robinson draws on the experience of Community Links staff, service users, and partners, to demonstrate the Community Links approach to local social regeneration.

The book concludes with a set of recommendations to government for sustaining, developing and replicating the Community Links model. Collectively these would do more than contribute to the reform of public services. They would transform them.

Order online www.bit.ly/outoftheordinary and pay what you think it's worth to you.



'How do we build a society that prevents problems from occurring rather than one that, as now, copes with the consequences?'

This was the question that the Early Action Task Force set out to consider.

Community Links is a social action charity in east London and early action – building a fence at the top of the cliff rather than running an ambulance at the bottom – has been at the heart of our strategy for 35 years. This approach is frequently voiced in politicians' speeches but not embedded in public policy.

Whilst government spending has been cut over the last year, the rhetoric of preventative approaches has grown. We've drawn together a Task Force of experts who share our concerns to consider that paradox and try to understand why common sense is not finding its way into common practice.

Early action is sometimes used as shorthand for services for those under five years old. This report is not just about them. Their needs are very important but forestalling problems, not coping with the consequences, is socially and financially a smart thing to do from cradle to grave.

The Task Force proposes that early action should be a fundamental principle shaping the way in which both government and civil society spend their resources and judge their success. Investing wisely and early in social wellbeing yields a triple dividend – thriving lives, costing less, contributing more. In this, their first report, the Task Force put forward a set of ideas and initiatives for developing a community that is 'ready for everything' – not one that picks up the pieces and counts the cost.

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