



“a holistic approach to working with children”



ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

Introduction

ECM Workbank provides a new approach to the employment of individuals delivering services for children and young people.

The ECM Workbank “collective self-employment” model combines the advantages of freelance working with those of employment in a large organisation. By enabling individuals to work flexibly as part of a multi-disciplinary team there can be a greater responsiveness in how children centred services can be delivered. Most importantly it enables children, young people and their families to have the continuity and support they feel appropriate to their individual needs and circumstances.

Originally developed as part of the Children’s Workforce Development Council’s New Types of Worker (NTOW) Programme through a partnership between Kent County Council and the Individual Learning Company. ECM Workbank was launched as an independent not-for-profit organisation in Spring 2009. It is a social enterprise collectively owned by its members rather than shareholders. ECM Workbank partners are “members” of the company employed on a zero hours contract; with the flexibility to choose what they work on and their pay for particular types of work.

Currently there is a network of 40 partners, drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds including education, youth work, health and social work. Together partners offer a depth of experience and expertise at practitioner, managerial and strategic levels. On-going training, peer support and quality systems ensure a high standard of service capacity and are able to provide tailored services.

ECM Workbank is a successful demonstration of an innovative approach which can be replicated in other situations.

During 2009/10, ECM Workbank has established a growing list of service commissions, demonstrating in practice the advantages of this approach to workforce employment. These include working with disaffected individuals to re-engage with society, helping improve services for those with drugs and alcohol related problems and assisting in the delivery of youth services



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The Context

Kent is the one of the largest local authorities and is at the forefront of testing new approaches to service delivery; At a strategic level, there is great interest in looking at how new ways of working can assist in matching demand and supply for skilled workers at different levels of the children’s workforce. Using multi-disciplinary “team around the child” approaches and staff members from different backgrounds to provide cross-disciplinary knowledge and expertise.

Typically ECM Workbank is appealing to two main types of people. The first type of partners are professionals who are existing freelance workers for whom ECM Workbank is a secure source of additional work with the added benefits of peer contact and support. Interestingly, some partners have asked ECM Workbank to assist with work they have independently been invited to undertake, either because they wish to draw on the expertise of other partners or the volume of work is too great for them alone.

The second type of partner are professionals who have recently retired and wish to continue working in the sector, albeit on a less intensive basis. These partners are able to focus on the specific aspects of their former jobs from which they gain most satisfaction. It also means the sector retains their specialist experience – which is also being cascaded to other partners.

Building Awareness with Service Commissioners

For commissioners the primary interest in ECM Workbank has been in its potential as an alternative source of service delivery. Key questions arising include track record, range of expertise, quality assurance and price. The flexibility and responsiveness of being able to draw on a pool of expertise has proved attractive. This has resulted in some requests to react quickly to urgent short term priorities (problem solving). In other cases, commissioners have

worked co-operatively to address planned needs as part of their ongoing service delivery plans.

Contacts have been made with most of the Local Children's Strategic Partnerships across Kent. This has resulted in a number of positive expressions of interest and discussions about potential opportunities for ECM Workbank to engage in service delivery. A difficulty encountered has been the uncertainty felt by some about their current and future organisational arrangements. Though some work has been directly commissioned this has been a significant factor.

The recent economic climate and consequent pressure on organisational budgets has also been noticed. This has caused a combination of concerns including uncertainty about future funding perspectives and the need for demonstrating value for money. This affected the willingness to move away from existing delivery partners. However some contacts have also seen that ECM Workbank may offer a more cost-effective alternative to traditional delivery partners in particular circumstances.

Initial discussions have also been held about the possibility of applying the ECM Workbank approach in supporting the use of Direct Payments for Personal Assistant with adults.



Activities Undertaken

ECM Workbank has undertaken 20 commissions from 14 different contracting partners. The smallest piece of work has been for £300 to organise a series of parent and toddler mornings to a £49,000 partnership based project to assist leisure break providers to make their services more accessible to young people with disabilities.

Activities undertaken include:

Youth working

Supporting House a mobile drop in shop for young people organised in conjunction KCC Youth and Community

Fathers group

Running a series of Saturday morning sessions for fathers and male carers with their children to help build relationships, on behalf of Maidstone Children's Centre

Summer scheme

Organisation of best practice training for summer scheme staff and evaluation of their activities on behalf of KDAT – Kent Drugs and Alcohol Team

Workforce Development

Training staff of leisure providers in supporting people with disabilities and also training young people as buddies to accompany those with disabilities, supported by Canterbury LCSP

Anti Bullying

Organisation of sessions for adults and young people in schools on how to address the cause of bullying and to respond to bullying activity organised in support of Safe Schools working with Dover and Canterbury LCSPs

Advocacy

Working with learning disabled people, this commission is Monitoring gathering feedback from users of the advocacy service to inform future service development

Details of all potential commissions are circulated to all partners with an open invitation to express their interest in participating. Where a number of partners express an interest various discussions are held – sometimes involving the commissioners themselves – to identify the most appropriate team to participate. While this is a potentially fraught process, in practice once the details of a commission are considered it has been relatively easy to reach agreement on who in practice undertakes each individual piece of work. The collegiate nature of the ECM Workbank has also meant that several partners may contribute ideas and recommendations even though they are not directly involved with the commission.

Delivery of ECM Workbank activities is supported by a small core team working on behalf of partners. While it was intended to establish an external Steering Group, consultations with potential members suggested that this would be premature until ECM Workbank had moved into a more firmly established phase.

ECM WORKBANK

During 2009/10 the total income of ECM Workbank was £178,000 against an in-year expenditure of £105,000. The income includes project funding received for activities to be completed in 2010/2011. Therefore overall there was a modest surplus of £5,000 to carry forward into 2010/2011. In the long term ECM Workbank will aim to establish a working capital sufficient to maintain a stable cashflow and contingency fund.

Key Lessons

ECM Workbank is an ambitious initiative to test an innovative approach to service delivery. As such meeting the needs of children and young people is the primary but not sole purpose of ECM Workbank activity. Also important is to draw key lessons to inform both the future development of ECM Workbank itself but also to create knowledge that can be used in other situations.

Key lessons gained during the first year of operations include:

Generally the interest of service commissioners is focused on the quality and cost-effectiveness of service delivery. While cognisant of the developmental nature of ECM Workbank operational expediency is a priority. Beneficially a number of individuals have been willing to advise and support ECM Workbank in its growth and development

The partners value both the work and networking opportunities generated on their behalf by ECM Workbank. At present it is premature to expect partners to make an exclusive commitment to ECM Workbank, however for a number of partners it is their primary route for service delivery.

There is an ongoing challenge for the ECM Workbank core team between generating new commissions and implementing existing work commissions. The systems established during the pilot stage have generally proved robust. Refinements have primarily dealt with points of detail.

Priorities for the next 12 months

Over the next twelve months the priorities for ECM Workbank are:

Continue to grow and develop the range of commissions being undertaken through:
Extending the range of services being delivered for existing commissioners
Transfer good practice from existing commissioners into opportunities for working with new commissioners

Enhancing links with local service commissioners to identify how existing partners could support them

Explore with strategic stakeholders from across the ECM spectrum how the ECM Workbank could develop new offers

Continue to develop the ECM Workbank range of partners

Strengthen the organisational base of ECM Workbank

Establish an Advisory Group made up of representatives from key external stakeholders (including children and young people) and ECM Workbank partners

