

# Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Tuesday 28 June 2011  
7.00 pm  
Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

## Supplemental Agenda

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NEWS Volunteers recruited in pilot schemes

## Parent mentoring 'can save £50,000'

Jim Dunton  
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Using volunteers to help support families with children at risk of being taken into care can be 20 times cheaper than a conventional support programme, according to one programme operator.

Early results from Community Service Volunteers (CSV) pilot programmes suggest that funding co-ordinators who arrange parenting mentors to work alongside child-protection professionals may achieve longer-lasting results than conventional programmes, and cost much less (see In Practice, right).

CSV has run Volunteers in Child Protection programmes in conjunction with Bromley, Lewisham, and Islington LBCs, Sunderland City Council, Southend-on-Sea BC, and is setting up a programme at Coventry City Council.

Sue Gwaspari, director of part-time volunteering at CSV, said that in some cases using volunteer mentors could prevent children getting to the stage where councils needed to put them on a child protection plan.

She said that the potential

investment of £1,000-£2,500 a year per child could result in huge savings on the £40,000-£50,000 costs of child protection plans.

"One 20th of the cost is a reasonable figure," she said.

"Saving money is definitely secondary to helping to improve people's lives. But if it is possible to stop children needing to go into care, or needing child protection plans, then there are big savings to be made."

Ms Gwaspari said that even improving people's parenting skills to the extent that children were inoculated on time produced positive knock-on effects for the health service.

She added that in Bromley hardly any of the children who had been involved with the programme during its first six years had had to go back on to child protection plans, versus a local average of about 11%.

Volunteers on the programme receive out-of-pocket expenses but are not paid. The cost associated with the programme comprises the roughly £25,000 a year to fund a co-ordinator who recruits approximately 35 volunteers.

## IN PRACTICE

### CSV scheme set to be forerunner in services revolution

Using unpaid volunteers to support families with children at risk fits David Cameron's Big Society agenda, reports Jim Dunton

We are likely to hear a lot more in the not too distant future about programmes such as Volunteers in Child Protection.

The Community Services Volunteers (CSV) programme, which pairs people who want to give something back with families whose children are known to social services, is attracting considerable attention.

For one thing, the new government's action plan has pledged to "support the creation and expansion" of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and give them "much greater involvement in the running of public services".

For another, new children and families junior minister Tim Loughton is well aware of the programme, and its successes were trumpeted in the recent Conservative paper *Child Protection: Back to the Frontline*.

Sue Gwaspari, CSV's director for part-time volunteering, is cautiously optimistic.

"It's good that Tim Loughton has been brought into the Department for Education – he's keen on our work," she said.

"The Big Society idea is positive news – provided it's

seen as volunteering in the community to achieve better outcomes, rather than as a cost-cutting agenda."

But Ms Gwaspari is adamant that volunteers – who, so far, range from former teenage mothers in their early 20s to retired city executives – cannot replace child-protection professionals.

She argues their role is passing on skills based on their experiences and being a "critical friend" who can spend more time with parents and their children than social workers, and who – crucially – is seen as being independent.

That is one reason she believes councils should not set up complementary volunteering schemes in-house.

So far, CSV has launched projects at a handful of councils, ranging from a small scheme aimed at parents with drug and alcohol or mental health problems at Islington LBC, to larger-scale work at Southend-on-Sea BC (see Comment, p18).

#### How it works

The principle is that one co-ordinator placed at the authority recruits and runs a pool of 35 volunteers, about 25 of whom are assigned fam-



Volunteer help could prevent children needing a protection plan

ALAMY

“Handing over early-intervention work to volunteers could make exchange and monitoring of information more complex to manage  
Helga Pile, Unison, p18



## BROMLEY LBC

One success story from Bromley LBC's project is mother-of-six Kim, who was helped to keep her children by volunteer John Cliff (both pictured).

John gave Kim assistance with parenting skills – including helping her get the children to school on time – and making sure the home was a safe environment.

As well as helping Kim and her children access crucial health and council services, he has helped keep some of the children occupied to give her breaks.

He has continued to support the family since Kim's children came off the child protection register.

Kim said it took about a month for her to begin to trust John.

"John started to give me practical help and the strength to start dealing with difficult situations for myself."

She said he had helped her regain control of her life and given her the confidence to begin a classroom assistant course.

ilies at any one time. Each coordinator costs approximately £25,000 a year to fund.

CSV is keen to set up about a dozen individual programmes to build up a good evidence base for its success, and Anglia Ruskin University is engaged in a two-year evaluation of progress.

According to Ms Gwaspari, families assigned volunteers are less likely to see their children returned to child-protection plans once they have left them, and it is suggested that early intervention help can obviate such plans in the first place.

She also stresses that volunteers tend to offer longer-term support than statutory services, whose support often ends when a protection plan finishes.

Julie Daly, head of safeguarding and quality assurance at Bromley LBC – which has run a programme with CSV since 2004 (see box, left)

“John started to give me practical help and the strength to start dealing with difficult situations for myself  
Kim, helped by the scheme (above)

“Once social workers were reassured that the volunteers were vetted, trained in child protection and supported, they were happy to refer families  
Julie Daly, head of safeguarding and quality assurance, Bromley LBC

– said the council recognised that social workers lacked the time to give parents the level of practical and emotional support they needed.

But she said the council had feared social workers would feel undermined by non-professionals having access to vulnerable families.

"Once social workers were reassured that the volunteers were properly vetted, well trained in child protection and well supported, they were happy to refer families to the project," she said.

Ms Daly said that in councils with a high turnover of social workers, volunteer mentors offered additional stability to families with problems. She added that Bromley had also benefited when several volunteers had gone on to full social-work training.

After an era in which, it has been argued, no one was championing the cause of projects such as CSV, the prospect of potentially saving millions of pounds and fulfilling election manifesto pledges could well see the organisation take its place at the forefront of a revolution.

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## A job for volunteers

(This article is published in the 22 July 2010 edition of Community Care under the headline 'A job for volunteers' and online on Friday 16 July 2010 under the title 'Pros and cons of using volunteers in child protection' [www.communitycare.co.uk](http://www.communitycare.co.uk))



Volunteers have undertaken social work for hundreds of years but should their involvement be formalised, particularly in the context of the Big Society? Natalie Valios reports

If ever there was a Big Society idea, then [Volunteers in Child Protection \(ViCP\)](#) is it.

The scheme, run by charity CSV, matches volunteers with families and children on protection plans to give practical advice and support. Not only does it help councils with the problem of not having enough social workers to work with families, but it also fits in with the government's ideas to involve volunteers more in running services.

Professor Eileen Munro, who is leading a review of the child protection system in England, has been asked to consider the support role volunteers might take on for social workers and the [Conservative party policy document on child protection](#), published before the election, praised the scheme.

But there are fears that volunteers could be used as a cut-price solution to the problem of social worker recruitment and might be loaded up with tasks that ought to be undertaken by qualified social workers.

However, an evaluation of the scheme in 2007 by Jane Tunstill, visiting professor, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, Kings College London, concluded that although there had been initial apprehension, volunteers were regarded by service users and social workers as "making an important contribution to the well-being of the children and families".

Tunstill says the volunteers did not want to take on social work tasks and were aware they lacked the skills. "But a number of them were inspired by the experience to go on and train as social workers."

"The scheme substantially increases the capacity of children's departments to deliver family support to vulnerable families. This sort of input constitutes a vital part of ensuring the welfare of children is safeguarded as well as promoted," Tunstill adds.

Originally a three-year pilot in two local authorities in 2004, the ViCP scheme now runs in the London boroughs of Bromley, Lewisham and Islington, and in Southend-on-Sea. The scheme is about to be launched in Coventry and CSV is in talks with others.

There are currently just over 100 volunteers. Sue Gwaspari, head of part-time volunteering at CSV, says: "They work with children at risk of serious harm through neglect. They give basic parenting help but, unlike parenting classes, this is done within the home so the volunteer sees them in their real circumstances. Volunteers are not a threatening presence in the home - they have no powers to take a child away, they are there to listen and help. They have time to go in several times a week to build a relationship with a family and can turn up when it suits the family, at weekends and evenings which social workers just can't do."

She points to the fact that none of the families who have been helped off child protection plans by the scheme, have had to be re-registered. "Bromley said it would expect 11% or more who come off plans to go back on them," Gwaspari says. She adds that the figure is even more significant as often councils use volunteers as a last resort before taking a child into care.

The scheme is backed by charity thinktank New Philanthropy Capital which, in 2007, recommended ViCP to funders; three went on to invest money in the scheme. Angela Kail, research analyst at NPC points out that it costs councils about £2,200 per family per year to invest in the scheme and CSV matches that. It costs £40,000 per year to have a child on a child protection plan.

These figures make the low uptake from local authorities surprising. But Kail puts it down to the Baby P case: "Local authorities went into crisis management mode and weren't looking at how external services could help them."

Gwaspari agrees; before Baby P some 40 local authorities were interested. "We are hoping the momentum we gained then will return. There is a body of evidence behind it now; its time has come."

Find out more at <http://www.csv.org.uk>

[Join the debate on Carespace](#)

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/carespace/forums/volunteers-in-childrens-social-care-7614.aspx#30432>

[More on Bromley's volunteering scheme](#)

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2004/05/20/44809/Benefit-or-burden.htm>

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## **Case study: Southend Council ViCP scheme**

### **'It helps that I am not a professional'**

Southend-on-Sea has used the ViCP scheme for the past year. The council uses some 50 volunteers to support 40 families. Michael Stephenson, group manager in specialist services in children's services, says it used the scheme to see if it could make progress with the 15-20% of those who had been on child protection plans for more than 18 months.

"We wanted to look at whether we could really work with those families to engender change. An important aspect for us is that volunteers work off a child protection plan or a child-in-need plan, so they work to make specific changes to the family."

For Caroline Jennings, a social work team manager in the child and family support team, the appeal of ViCP is that "social workers don't have the time to spend quality time with children and parents. Most people respond to the time, patience and understanding that the volunteers are able to give".

With seven children aged between 18-28, Lorraine Garten felt she had a lot to offer as a volunteer and is now supporting her fourth family. "Initially, families are scared about why you are there, but after a few weeks the barrier comes down and you build a bond," she says. "It helps that I'm not a professional and that I've got children myself."

Depending on the situation she visits families up to three times a week. Rather than accompany a social worker, volunteers visit alone - it is an important part of the scheme that they are independent of the local authority. They then report back to their manager - a CSV member of staff co-located in the council's children's services - who passes information onto the social worker.

Garten's third family was a 19-year-old mother who was neglecting her two-year-old daughter. Initially the mother was defensive, but, says Garten, "you're there to encourage, so when there's a big pile of washing on the floor and the next time you go it's gone, I'd say 'something looks different' and she'd tell me that she washed, ironed and put it all away. I would say 'well done' because it's a big step for her. That encouraged her to do more. A few weeks later she painted the place and turned a house into a home."

"Her child was on a child protection plan, then classed as a child-in-need and then signed off by social services. At that last meeting she said, 'if it wasn't for CSV's involvement I wouldn't be where I am today'."

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## **Pros and cons of volunteers**

### Pros

- Volunteers have the time to visit often and do practical things like help with budgeting, cleaning and playing with children.
- Parents see volunteers as non-threatening and might be more inclined to reveal the truth to them.
- Volunteers can be another pair of eyes and ears for the social worker.
- Volunteers can be inspired by the experience to train as social workers.

### Cons

- Social workers may distrust volunteers and have strong feelings about working with them.
  - A volunteer could become emotionally involved with the family and try to undermine a social worker's decision.
  - Some think volunteers should be used in early intervention and not in cases where there are child protection concerns.
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