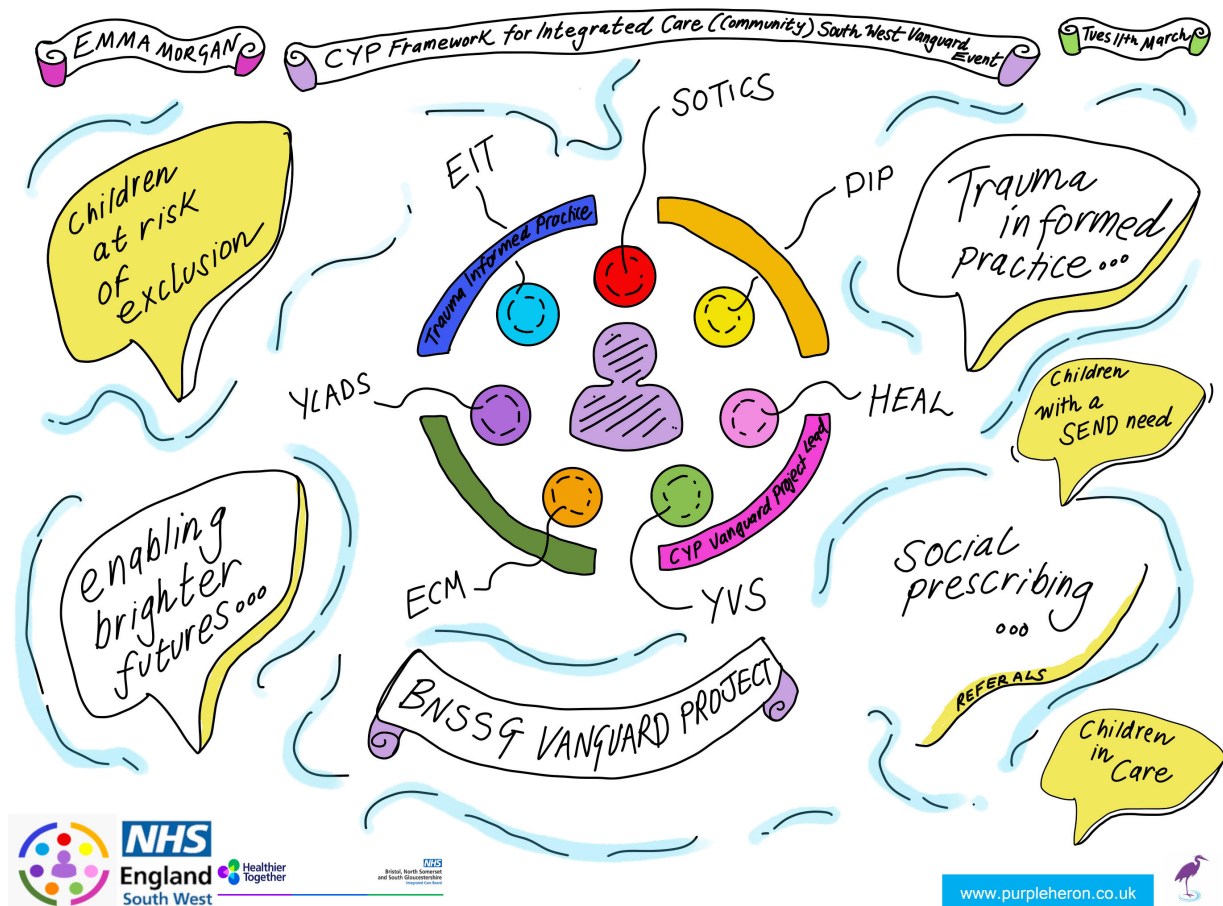


Partnership and Collaboration within The BNSSG Vanguard Children and Young People's Services



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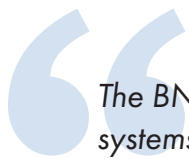
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Forewords

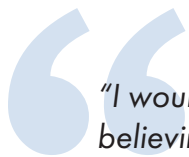


The BNSSG Vanguard is demonstrating the real impact of local systems working together, breaking down barriers, sharing expertise and importantly, improving the experience and outcomes for children and young people. It is testament to the collaborative commissioning between NHS England and BNSSG ICB and the integrated care delivered by statutory and voluntary sector partners, brilliantly guided by the insight of young people themselves”.



Gail Warnes,

Senior Commissioning Manager, Non Custodial and CYP, Health and Justice at NHS England South West



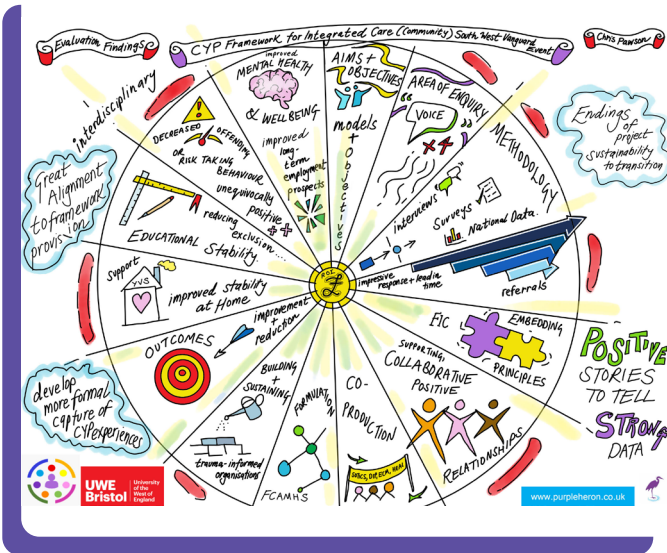
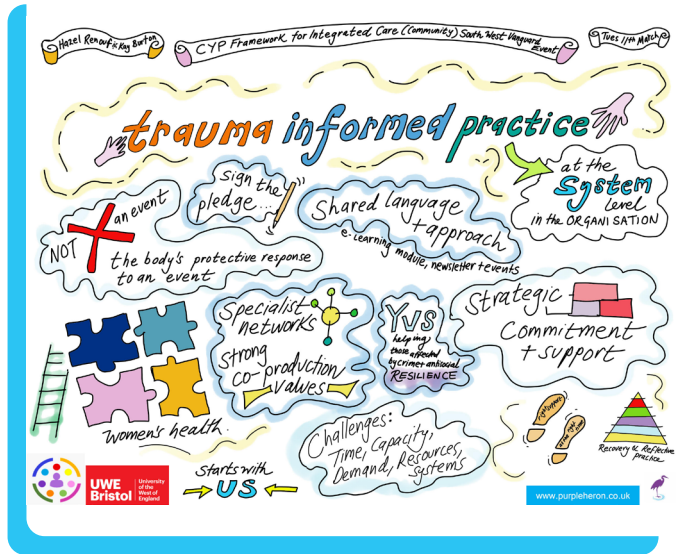
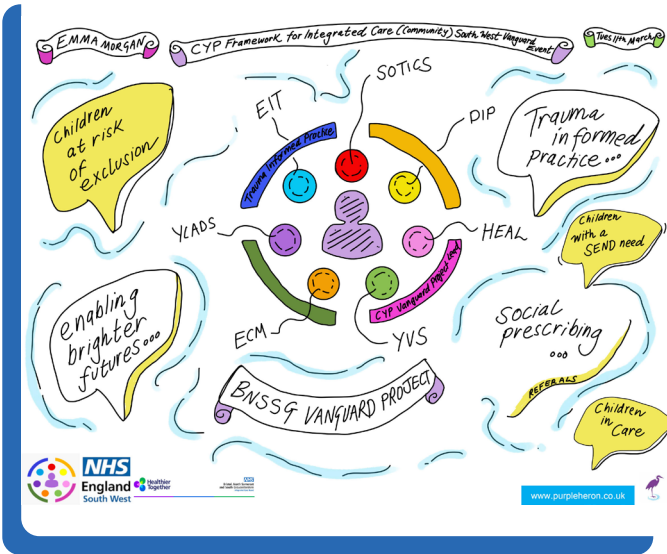
“I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the ICB for believing in my ability to deliver this project, despite my initial lack of formal project management experience. Drawing on my 27 years of clinical experience as a mental health nurse working with children and young people (CYP) with complex needs, alongside the training provided by the ICB, I was able to develop the skills necessary to successfully deliver this work.



I am immensely grateful to every provider involved in the Vanguard project, from service delivery teams to project enablers. Their unwavering commitment is clearly reflected in this research, which not only meets key performance indicators but also demonstrates a shared dedication to improving outcomes for CYP within the Vanguard, enabling them to thrive.”

Emma Morgan,

Children Performance Manager, BNSSG ICB.



1. Introduction

As part of a national NHS England Health and Justice Programme, the NHS Framework for Integrated Care was developed primarily to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

Of particular focus for the Framework¹ was the support of children and young people who experience some of the highest levels of health inequality in society, due to their vulnerability to a variety of complex and persistent health and wellbeing needs. This focus was a direct response to a recognition that children and young people (CYP) with complex health needs often struggle to access support services, which is further exacerbated by these services often being unable to adequately develop collaborative systems which meet the needs of this cohort. NHS England South West Health and Justice team commissioned, the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board 'Vanguard' to pilot the Framework within this region. As part of this remit, a central aim was to build a collaborative system of partner organisations (statutory and non-statutory) that enabled improved trauma-informed support, and which was more responsive to the complex challenges faced by children and young people identified by the project.

The formal evaluation of the Vanguard project (led by the University of the West of England) identified a number of positive developments against project outcomes. Many of these positive developments cohered around the (early) identification of children and young people requiring access to health services, which had a subsequent impact on increased referrals to specialist services, more immediate assessments, and earlier discharges.

The evaluation also found that social prescribing provision in the BNSSG region had been enhanced. In all cases, the evaluation highlighted the growth and strengthening of collaborative working practices between partner organisations as being pivotal to the successes of the Vanguard against project outcomes.

Given the central importance of effective collaboration between partner organisations to deliver project outcomes, the University of Bath was invited to conduct a focused research project (separate to the formal evaluation) to examine the processes and mechanisms that contributed to the development of the collaborative system employed during the Vanguard. Based on an examination of data gathered during a focus group conducted with representatives of eight organisations that were members of the Vanguard partnership (100 minutes in duration), this report provides empirical evidence to support and validate the partnership approach undertaken within the Vanguard project, utilising a theoretical model of partnership working developed by Dr Colin Baker and Dr Haydn Morgan (see Morgan et al., 2023²) to highlight particular strengths within the partnership operations and identify areas for potential development for future iterations of the project.

¹ The Framework for Integrated Care: <https://www.annafreud.org/services/services-for-professionals/the-framework-for-integrated-care-a-catalyst-for-change/>

² Morgan, H., Baker, C. & Coleman, J. (2023). 'Examining the Role of Partnership within Sport and Physical Activity Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation Projects'. In: H. Morgan and A. Parker (eds.) *Sport, Physical Activity and Criminal Justice: Politics, Policy and Practice*. Routledge, pp.37-50.

2. Background and Context

The BNSSG Vanguard project successfully brought together numerous multi-systems, multi-agency organisations, spanning the geographical area of Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and extending into Bath and North-East Somerset (including the wider Avon and Somerset area). This collaborative endeavour, coupled with the integral involvement of experts by experience, cultivated a unique climate of shared purpose which transcended traditional organisational boundaries.



The BNSSG Vanguard project was delivered through seven distinct 'pathways' across the region (summarised in Table 1), which coordinated existing service provision and delivery organisations:

Pathway (Organisation)	Key Function and Approach	Geographical Area
1. Drugs Inclusion Partnership (DIP)	A partnership of three local organisations focusing on supporting CYP at risk of educational exclusion due to their own or familial substance use (Child Affected by Substances - CABS).	Bristol (Bristol Drugs Project - BDP), North Somerset (Substance Advice Service - SAS), and South Gloucestershire (Young Peoples Drug and Alcohol Service - YPDAS).
2. Enable Inclusion Team (EIT)	Psychological outreach service using contextual psychological science (DNA-V and ACT models) to support CYP who are, or may become, at risk of exclusion from mainstream educational settings, including those with emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA). Also delivers the Coaching for Resilience in Secondary Schools Project (CRISSP).	Originally South Gloucestershire, expanded to cover Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire.
3. Safer Options Trauma Informed Consultation Service (SOTICS)	Offers a psychology-informed formulation and consultation process, primarily working indirectly with the professional network surrounding CYP with complex needs. It is influenced by the Enhanced Case Management (ECM) model, using multi-agency case formulation to understand trauma impacts.	The BNSSG community (supporting networks across this area).
4. Enhanced Case Management (ECM)	Youth Justice Service (YJS) approach providing psychology-led, multi-agency case formulation and intervention planning for children involved in the justice system with a history of trauma. Offers full formulation, regular multi-agency reviews, and clinical supervision for YJS Case Managers.	Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and BaNES Youth Justice Services.
5. Avon and Somerset Young Victim's Service (YVS)	Supports CYP (up to 25 with additional needs) who are victims of, or affected by, crime, anti-social behaviour, and domestic abuse. Delivers person-centred, one-to-one support through trauma-informed advocates, using evidence-based interventions like therapeutic play and Healing Together.	Avon and Somerset area.
6. Youth Liaison and Diversion (YLaDS)	An assessment and referral service that provides early intervention for CYP identified through the criminal justice system (CJS) who have vulnerabilities (e.g., mental health, neurodiversity, substance misuse). Its purpose is to identify unmet needs and facilitate appropriate onward signposting to services.	Supported the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, with referrals coming from across BNSSG.
7. Barnardo's - Helping Empower Adolescents Lives (HEAL)	Offers mental health and wellbeing support to those indirectly affected by serious violence. Uses a three-tier model, including community presence (Tier 1), targeted group interventions (Tier 2), and school-based mental health programmes (Tier 3), focusing on trauma recovery frameworks.	Bristol area.

Table 1: The Seven Vanguard Pathways

To support the delivery of the seven pathways, three specialist project enablers were created (Table 2):

Project Enabler	Key Function and Approach	Geographical Area
Trauma-Informed Systems Programme (TISM)	Led by the Trauma-Informed Systems Manager and a Senior Project Support Officer, these roles were embedded within the BNSSG Integrated Care Board (ICB). The roles support the promotion, development, and embedding of trauma-informed practice and systems change. The programme focuses on supporting staff wellbeing, raising awareness and knowledge, and developing an accessible trauma-informed framework across sectors.	BNSSG (Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire).
Barnardo’s Lived Experience Advisory Groups (HYPE & Black and Brown Minds Matter)	Provided crucial lived experience expertise, ensuring co-production that incorporates the CYP voice in shaping the Vanguard. HYPE specifically worked collaboratively with multiple pathways (HEAL, ECM, EIT, DIP, YL&D) to review service communications, assessment processes, and action plans to make them more trauma informed.	Supported the entire BNSSG Vanguard pathways.
Forensic CAMHS (FCAMHS), Oxford Health	Provided clinical and psychological expertise. Delivered trauma training to the seven pathways. Offered dedicated monthly reflective practice spaces for the Vanguard pathways to support reflection and case formulation. Also provided clinical leadership and Post Incident Psychological (PIP) Support Sessions in response to critical incidents.	Supported the entire BNSSG Vanguard pathways.

Table 2: Project Enablers and Core Support

The Vanguard partnership engaged in a facilitated, one-day ‘partnership workshop’ in February 2023, which was used to reflect upon previous experiences of collaborative working and use these reflections to explore and develop a set of ‘standards’ for how the Vanguard partnership would function and operate during the project. Not only did this workshop allow Vanguard members to challenge their assumptions about partnership working, it also allowed discussion on professional roles and experiences, enabled members to discuss their personal values and aspirations for the Vanguard project, and explore what implications this may have for collaborative working. More importantly, the workshop acted as a (informal) ‘Foundation Phase’ for the Vanguard partnership, providing members with a space to formulate a set of principles and establish an approach to collaborative working that they could use as a basis for future partnership operations. This ensured that all members were equitably represented in the partnership and were able to i) co-define the resources they held and could offer to the Vanguard, ii) co-design the approaches to working collaboratively, and iii) co-own the results to reduce single points of failure in the partnership.

3. Partnership working – a brief summary of the academic evidence

The concept of partnership working has been widely accepted and implemented as a means to address a range of social problems (Dickinson and Glasby, 2010³; Woodland and Hutton, 2012⁴). However, from a theoretical perspective, partnership working is one of the most overused yet least understood terms in contemporary policy literature, and a failure to adequately capture its meaning and identify which aspects might usefully support its effectiveness is a long-standing problem (Rosenbaum, 2002⁵; Woodland and Hutton, 2012).

Broadly speaking, from a theoretical perspective, all partnerships sit on a continuum between two ideal types - **strategic** and **communicative** partnerships. Strategic partnerships are characterised by their instrumental approach towards partnership working, where collaborations are drawn together for pragmatic reasons based upon the resources (financial, human, physical, etc.) that each partner can offer to the partnership. In such partnerships, the goals and targets that the partnership seeks to achieve are directed from the top-down (usually from the partner who is providing the most financial input), with a criteria-driven operating environment in place to incentivise the delivery of partnership work. Typically, strategic partnership arrangements involve short-term, programme-specific relationships which are directed towards goal achievement and operational concerns.

In contrast, communicative partnerships are built from the 'bottom-up', where partners work together to identify problems relevant to the context that they operate in and build solutions (through working together) to solve these problems that are sensitive to the context in which they operate. Communicative partnerships emphasise the value of developing stronger and more effective partnership processes, rather than being solely concerned with targets and outcomes. This fosters co-design processes within the development of projects, and a commitment to co-evolution as the partnership matures, which, in turn, ensures that social action and transformative change for the target beneficiaries is embedded within the partnership's activities.

Academic research into partnership operations highlights several shortcomings in projects where strategic partnerships are to the fore. For example, research conducted by Morgan and Baker (2021⁶) emphasised the high prevalence of strategic partnerships within projects involving physical activity to support criminal justice outcomes, with collaborative working arrangements being synonymous with criteria-driven and incentivised delivery, which responded to short-term targets. Problematically, this led to a strongly pragmatic approach to building partnership relationships which overlooked the importance of building meaningful relationships, mutual cooperation and consensus. Moreover, these strategic partnerships often led to intensified scrutiny of partnership outcomes, increased competition between partners, created a persistent fear of failure, and promoted a transactional approach to partnership operations, all of which undermined the true potential of partnerships in this sector. Consequently, Morgan and Baker (2021) propose that communicative partnerships, which emphasise processes over outcomes, and co-evolution and co-design, may present a more effective approach to partnership working.



³Dickinson, H., & Glasby, J. (2010). 'Why Partnership Working Doesn't Work': Pitfalls, problems and possibilities in English health and social care. *Public Management Review*, 12(6), 811–828.

⁴Woodland, R. H., & Hutton, M. S. (2012). Evaluating organizational collaborations: Suggested entry points and strategies. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 33(3), 366–383.

⁵Rosenbaum, D. (2002). Evaluating multi-agency anti-crime partnerships: Theory, design, and measurement issues. *Crime Prevention Studies*, 14, 171–225.

⁶Strategic or communicative partnerships? Insights from sports programmes in the criminal justice sector. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(4), 715–732.

4. The Vanguard partnership – a move away from strategic partnerships?

In general, partnerships of the size and scale of the one established for the Vanguard project embody many of the hallmarks of strategic partnerships. Specifically, the fact that the Vanguard partnership was established for a specific duration and had very clear outcomes to be attained within this period, indicated that the partnership had a strong instrumental focus. To this end, the Vanguard partnership had the potential to display an approach to partnership working that closely resembled other (previous) collaborative practices, which invariably aligned with the characteristics of strategic partnership.

However, there were clear indications that despite the instrumental and strategic purpose of the Vanguard partnership, members were committed to ensuring that the factors and behaviours that often limit the effectiveness of strategic partnerships were not replicated.

Consequently, there was evidence of a clear shift away from the instrumental confines of strategic partnerships.

Most telling was a consensus that all members within the Vanguard partnership were committed to being part of a **“bigger movement”** related to the implementation of trauma-informed approaches and practices. Having this over-arching aim meant that the partnership became less directed by the specific outcomes that had been set by the project but was more motivated and guided by a desire to work towards a shared aim. In doing so, members were dedicated to working directly with the identified cohort for the project (vulnerable children and young people), and this ensured that all partnership operations and decisions had an agreed common focus of **“putting young people first”**.

Generating consensus through a common focus had other beneficial consequences for the Vanguard partnership. In contrast to previous partnerships that members had been engaged in which had **“felt quite isolating and insulating”**, the Vanguard partnership felt more collaborative, characterised by an honesty and authenticity from all group members, which enabled members to **“feel safe”** to express opinions and ensure that **“involvement in the partnership was meaningful”**. Moreover, members expressed that within the Vanguard partnership there was little conflict.

Critically, members outlined how there was a strong commitment to learning within the Vanguard partnership, rather than simply meeting set objectives, targets, and outcomes, which typify strategic partnerships. This created a working environment where members felt comfortable to ask questions, ‘check and challenge’ each other, obtain clarification on project operations, or share ideas and good practice. Importantly, members expressed how they felt comfortable to ‘reach out’ to other partners, which was in sharp contrast to previous partnerships, where ‘reaching out’ was often perceived as a sign of weakness. Moreover, members expressed that a focus on learning increased capacity and enabled the Vanguard partnership to give consideration to future working practices (beyond the Vanguard itself) which offered an element of sustainability to the work.

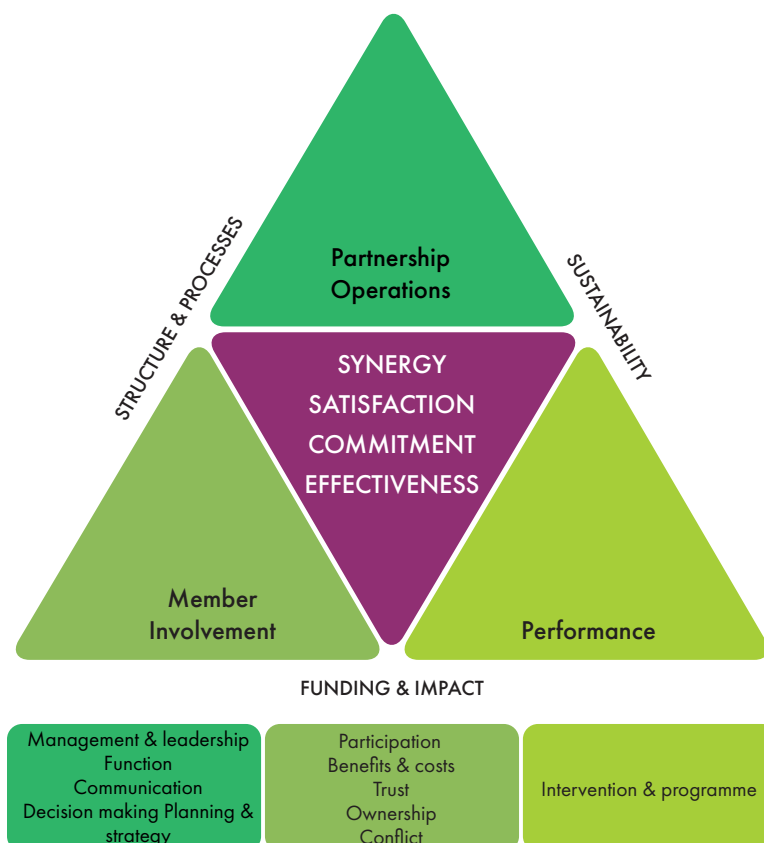
These reflections also provide an indication that the Vanguard partnership displayed characteristics of a communicative partnership, through an awareness of a common goal that was specific to the context they were operating within. In addition, making this common goal more ‘concrete’ was underpinned by a deep commitment to using project learnings to co-design solutions, which evolved as the Vanguard project matured. The next section outlines specific examples of how the Vanguard partnership embodied a more communicative approach to their collaboration.



5. The emergence of communicative partnerships within the Vanguard

Despite the widespread application of strategic partnerships in practice, and their clear ability to produce short-term results, academic evidence indicates that communicative partnerships might be a more effective way of ensuring the sustainability of sport-based programmes and the attainment of a wider array of outcomes.

A model of partnership working developed by Colin Baker and Haydn Morgan (see Morgan et al., 2023), has attempted to provide a theoretical basis to inform the development of communicative partnerships. In short, the model attempts to capture the structural, process, and involvement indicators that are predictive of members' perceptions concerning partnership working. These indicators provide a means of understanding important areas of focus to sustain collaborative activities, and are conceptualised as:



Within the Vanguard partnership, members highlighted a wealth of examples which spoke directly to these four elements of communicative partnership working.

Synergy concerns how well those working in partnership situations are able to achieve successes through working together. Primarily, this involves being able to accomplish more than could be achieved by acting independently of other organisations. It is only through collaboration that this takes place. Research has indicated that elements such as adaptability, responsiveness, and *'working with'* beneficiaries (those benefitting directly from the programme), underpin synergistic ways of operating (Morgan and Baker, 2022⁷).

⁷Morgan, H. & Baker, C. (2022). A model for partnership working in sport and criminal justice. Bristol: Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice.

There was a consensus among members that central to their perceptions of synergy was the shared sense of purpose that they derived by having a clear focus on how a trauma-informed system might be designed and implemented.

This '**bigger purpose**' for the project acted as an anchor for partnership operations and enabled each partner to consider their role and contribution as part of a collective effort. One reflection (among many) illustrated this aspect of synergy:

"There was an opportunity to do something bigger than just focus on children and young people in the strictest sense but to focus on improving their outcomes by bringing about systems change ... So, it was less about 'sharing' the same young people ... but it was more about this collective intention to want to do things differently and be more authentic and honest about becoming more trauma informed. This was as much about being a part of a bigger movement ... and impacting and influencing others around us."

Building upon this sense of shared purpose and working differently towards a common goal not only enabled the Vanguard to look beyond the narrow confines of key performance indicators (KPIs) but also maintained focus on the project as a whole. One respondent indicated how this was different to previous partnership working experiences and something that they (and others) had valued about working more collaboratively and synergistically.

"We were [used to] working separately in our little bubbles, but being able to come together with people with the same goals and having that shared purpose and being able to link in to those opportunities for training and thinking together ... and be reflective and think about the higher level purpose rather than the day-to-day task was really nice ... and being part of something bigger – I really valued that."

Synergy was also articulated by the way in which the Vanguard partnership had enabled services to be broadened or deepened. This was very much the case within efforts to provide earlier intervention or 'upstream provision'. One member reflected on this aspect in relation to their specific service:

"Often, we get involved much too late, when children are experiencing addiction issues, have been excluded from school, not engaging with other services, and this project allowed us to be more upstream to work with children ... and it's what we'd all like to do, but don't always have the capacity and funding to do..."

'Being valued' was a theme that was evident in many members' experiences of the Vanguard. One member in particular spoke about how previous partnerships were hierarchical in nature, where those in positions with more power or influence, or those with higher formal qualifications, typically dominated the direction of work and meeting conversations. However, relationships in the Vanguard were reported as being more democratic and non-hierarchical, drawing parallels with theoretical understandings of communicative partnerships. They continued:

"I found with the Vanguard that it never felt like it was hierarchical in terms of expertise and equal value was placed on contributions and involvement regardless of qualifications, expertise, and experience and I found that really created a safe space for learning. My experience before was if you're in a room with a psychologist, well they know more than you and they take the lead ... and then if there's a psychiatrist then they trump that, but there was none of that at all. But in terms of being able to work together ... it felt like it was a level-playing for everybody to be valued and being able to contribute."

Building more collaborative (and less hierarchical) relationships within the partnership was noted by one member as being a factor that had helped to build synergy and unite partners. Critically, this member outlined how operating in a more relational manner mirrored a central component of their day-to-day work. They explained:

“We work relationally, and I think having the relationships with the other providers [and partners] it means you can ask the difficult questions and not understand and feel safe, and go back for additional learning and understanding ... that meant it was more meaningful and a lot more confident in using [trauma-informed approaches].”

Being adaptable and responsive is a key element of synergy, and there were several testimonies reflecting on how the Vanguard partnership had demonstrated this. Again, focussing more on the wider aim of the Vanguard (to be better trauma-informed) rather than concentrated on project KPIs, created a space to consider more creative and innovative solutions. As one member reflected:

“There was something about having that over-arching goal as a collective as it freed us up a bit to make amendments to fulfil the brief ... you know, ‘if we did it this way, would that work well’ ... there was an innovative space to think ... so having that opportunity to adapt to [children and young person’s] needs.”

One final, but critical, aspect of synergy within the Vanguard, was the intentional inclusion of young people (project beneficiaries) within several partnership events, working alongside partner organisations to enable an approach that sought to put the lived experience of young people at the centre of partnership operations. One member outlined the importance of this approach to enhance synergy:

“Having these young people with lived experience be alongside us should be the key thing we take away from this; just how important it is to have the people that you’re talking about and supporting involved in the planning, decisions, what’s going to work, what’s not going to work ... I think we get so lost in our professional worlds that just asking the people that need the support what they want makes complete sense and I’m glad that the Vanguard was able to prioritise that...”

Satisfaction relates to the extent to which those working in partnership derive fulfilment from their engagement in the partnership, both in terms of how people work together but also the way in which people are satisfied by the way partnership processes and plans are implemented. When partners derive satisfaction, they suggest that work is done for ‘the right reasons’, there is a stronger and more authentic commitment to co-design and ‘bottom-up’ approaches, and competition between partners is reduced (Morgan and Baker, 2022). Competition among partners can significantly undermine partnership effectiveness and long-term success, negatively affecting trust and joined-up thinking.

Within the Vanguard, satisfaction (when defined in this way) was identified as one of the major contributors to the positive outcomes achieved by the partnership. Members outlined how they felt they were part of a ‘true collaboration’ with relationships built on trust, which offered a supportive space for members to not only contribute effectively to outcomes but to develop and learn as professionals. While these reflections resonated with theoretical articulations of ‘bottom up’ approaches, in reality the Vanguard partnership had no defined ‘bottom’ to the collaboration, and instead had a strong commitment to the equitable involvement of all partners. One member noted how a recognition of power imbalances and mitigating these to enable equitable involvement was central to their levels of satisfaction with the Vanguard:

“When we did training events and workshops there was an acknowledgement of any power imbalances in the room ... it just helped to create an open and honest way of talking among ourselves and make our work meaningful rather than ‘tick box’ ...”

Making work meaningful through authentic collaboration was noted by another member. More specifically they observed how there was an honesty about the challenges evident of working in this sector, and that this contextual recognition of work challenges helped to draw members closer together. They explained:

“All of us share a common thread that the work that we do is very meaningful but very difficult and very emotionally challenging, and being with other people that are living that day-in-day-out is in and of itself a really healthy practice ... you always leave the Vanguard [meetings] feeling refreshed ... for our own wellbeing it’s been really great.”

While this testimony offers further indication of the supportive environment that was created within the Vanguard, it was a reflection from a member whose organisation joined the Vanguard part way through the project that captured the collaborative (and less competitive) nature of the partnership:

“For us, we came in halfway through the project, which is not always the easiest place to start, but it didn’t feel difficult from the moment we all started to meet ... It didn’t feel like there was any competition, it didn’t feel like we had to try to prove ourselves ... it was just about trying to work out best next steps, best practice, and it was just a really valuable experience that built trust over time.”

One final reflection on satisfaction spoke to the critical relational and human aspects of collaboration. This member reflected on an exercise that was part of an initial Vanguard workshop, where members were encouraged to spend time with each in an informal setting to learn more about each other:

“I felt that [early on] we got an introduction to each other as human beings, which then leads to the safety and familiarity of building relationships and connecting as human beings rather than as somebody with a particular job title and a particular task...”

Commitment relates to the degree to which those working in partnership feel a degree of responsibility or duty towards the partnership. This enables open and honest relationships, and a culture of compromise and respect, alongside clarity regarding aims, expectations, roles and partner responsibilities. Commitment is displayed when partners willingly represent each other in other forums and demonstrate authentic passion for the community/beneficiaries they work with (Morgan and Baker, 2022).

Several members identified that commitment to the Vanguard was enhanced by having the common goal of improving trauma-informed practices across services. Having such clarity helped to set expectations for involvement and a responsibility to each other to work in a collaborative way towards this overarching aim. As one member explained:

“Maybe because of the philosophy of being trauma-informed, that drove us all on ... and when you see the effect it has on the young people and how much it influenced them. And when you see that directly, that makes you committed to the cause.”

Others spoke about how their commitment to the Vanguard was deepened by the authenticity of the project and the respectful nature of interactions between members which led to a culture of belonging. As one member observed:

“It wasn’t tokenistic. A lot of stuff like this that I’ve experienced in the past is just like a one-off ... two seconds later the direction changes again. And I think the Vanguard has been consistent with the message [of trauma-informed] ... and I’ve felt cared for within that ... everyone is cared for within it and that’s quite rare ... you want to work well for people who treat you well.”

The consistency and authenticity that the Vanguard partnership offered also afforded a greater sense of ownership for the wider project, liberating members to think differently about solutions and practices, which in turn, deepened their commitment to the partnership and motivated them to work towards the common goal. This sense of liberation, and the benefits it had for developing more informed and impactful practice, was captured by one member:

“In the current climate where there’s not loads of money, and where things are quite restricted and where things are so driven by outcome measures and there’s not a lot of chance to innovate or do things differently, one of the things that makes me so committed is that this was a unique opportunity to really make a difference ... it just felt like a golden opportunity to do something differently, which is increasingly rare ... It felt like a responsibility, but not in a heavy sense, more like an opportunity to get stuck in and make the most of it and be most impactful and leave the greatest legacy and ultimately benefit the young people by the learning and the chance to do things differently.”

Effectiveness relates to the factors that outline the degree to which the partnership is perceived as successful in producing a desired result. This might include the perceived contribution of the partnership to the community and beneficiaries that it serves, and the extent to which relations between those working in partnership are productive and capable of producing meaningful impacts. Importantly, partners do not always perceive effectiveness simply as being the ability to achieve KPIs. It is also about understanding and valuing wider aspects of effectiveness such as a focus on the way things are done, ensuring the sustainability of the partnership and/or the project, and a strong ethical and moral stance in their operations.

Again, members were able to articulate what effectiveness meant to them and how the partnership had produced meaningful impacts. As a starting point, members explained how effectiveness was more than the attainment of agreed KPIs for the project.

“Even though we had to do a dataset, there wasn’t a pressure on how many referrals, how long you worked with a child ... I didn’t feel any pressure ... It wasn’t like, ‘you’re not meeting those targets’ ... we did have KPIs, but we weren’t pressurised by them and people [managers] didn’t get annoyed”

Having more freedom around impact enabled a different form of accountability to emerge, where members felt themselves to be accountable to the young people they served, rather than to their immediate managers. Again, this culture of accountability was created through the supportive and authentic collaborative environment that was established:

“We were held to account with the outcomes from our individual services ... but we were held to account not in a disciplinary way, but in a positive way, in a supportive way and never feeling any sort of anxiety or shame in coming together with a group of people and having to reflect on how effective you’ve been. Everybody wanted everybody else to succeed and everybody wants the kids to be supported.”

A further benefit of this different approach to managing effectiveness was that the Vanguard was able to focus more on learning, which not only helped to support better delivery of services within the Vanguard but also generated key insights to support future provision and projects, offering an element of sustainability to the project. One member reflected upon this wider understanding of effectiveness:

“A lot of this [project] was capturing all that learning and that’s a lot of where the effectiveness has come from ... so that its in place for future systems that want to pick this up and carry on this sort of work – that’s what effectiveness meant to me ... that other people can pick this up and run with it.”

This focus on sustainability, and a ‘legacy’ for the Vanguard project, was elaborated upon by another member, who saw the benefits of prioritising learning (over meeting KPIs) providing a ‘ripple effect’ to inform projects beyond the Vanguard in different regions, with different cohorts, or with different partners. They explained:

“The resonance of the project, the work, the discussions we’ve had, the processes we’ve put in place ... it’s gone beyond trauma-informed to being trauma-responsive ... and seeing that in place and that that will continue. And when we come to review them [the learnings] in a year or two’s time, we’ll continue that learning and build upon that. Some of the partnerships that we’ve got ... and the beginnings of new work that’s coming out of it is proving [the Vanguard’s] effectiveness.”

6. Conclusions and Partnership Learnings

In contemporary government, partnership working is a preferred model of governance to deliver policy outcomes and address social problems. The findings from the evaluation of the Vanguard partnership present a series of 'learnings' that may provide guidance for the creation and development of future multi-system, multi-agency, and geographically diverse partnership approaches.

At a base level, effective and impactful partnerships require a **common purpose** around which members can focus, to align effort and enable stronger cooperation. For the Vanguard partnership, the common purpose of trauma-informed practice provided the foundation and impetus for strategic decisions, partnership activity, and programme delivery.

Central to defining this common purpose was an opportunity for partnership members to **come together prior to the start of the project to challenge their assumptions about partnership working and establish a set of principles and an approach to collaborative working** that formed the basis for future partnership operations. In this project, a workshop was held for this purpose, but a key learning from this evaluation is that some form of '**foundational phase/exercise**' for all partners is essential before the project commences.

Having a common purpose also ensured a number of wider benefits for effective partnership working and impactful project delivery:



Enabling the partnership to **advocate for project beneficiaries** (in this case children and young people in health and justice systems).



Being accountable to project beneficiaries not just KPIs. Attaining project KPIs remain important, but it should not be the sole focus of partnership operations.



Enabling expertise to be drawn from all members and enabling all partners to benefit from this expertise, not just those with 'qualified expertise'. Partnerships that are democratic and non-hierarchical in their structure are impactful.



Removing or **reducing competition between partners** for resource and attribution.



Ensuring that **sustainability is embedded in partnership operations**, recognising how partnership decisions taken today consider the future, both within and beyond the project. This provides a legacy for the project and supports the foundations for future projects and partnership working.

For further information:

<https://bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/research-and-evidence/impact-case-studies/children-and-young-peoples-vanguard-project/>

