The Fife Alcohol Partnership Project (FAPP) brought together a number of key national and local stakeholders to design, develop and implement a series of interventions, using a multi-component approach, to tackle alcohol-related harm. The partnership operated between 2008-2012, ultimately focusing on two designated pilot areas, Rosyth and Touch in Dunfermline.

Multi-agency partnership working on this complex and important issue is challenging and requires attention to the development of sound partnership structures and processes, an agreed outcomes framework and effective engagement, both with practitioners responsible for implementation and with wider communities. The interim report in May 2010 documented the early difficulties of the partnership process, but also heralded a watershed marked by new understandings and better working relationships amongst FAPP members. Since then the work of FAPP proceeded in a significantly different manner, acknowledging the importance of outcomes and a programme approach and based on better working relationships and new governance arrangements.

The final evaluation report focuses on the outcomes and broader lessons learned from the overall approach. It is written primarily for those stakeholders and communities facing similar challenges across Scotland and the wider UK. It is likely to be of particular interest to members of Alcohol and Drug Partnerships, Community Planning Partnerships and those with an interest in the public service reform agenda. This document summarises the main immediate outcomes and some lessons, with fuller details in the main report.

What outcomes did FAPP achieve?

Alcohol-related harm is now more broadly ‘on the agenda’ in both areas. The inter-professional relationships and those with local people developed as part of the work of FAPP have been highly valued by many partners and are seen as one of the major successes of the work. Both areas show promising early signs that a programme approach, combining intensive connected interventions which address enforcement and engagement, can:

- make inroads into ways of thinking about alcohol-related harm and who should define it
- promote growing engagement amongst professionals and with local people, including young people and create more positive relationships amongst local stakeholders, and
- begin to affect individual and group behaviours, at least in the short-term.

The two local partnership groups, the Rosyth Community Alcohol Partnership and the Touch...
Outcomes of the programme in Rosyth

Partners agree that the most successful interventions in Rosyth have been those that have either involved multi-agency delivery or good operational links with other elements of the programme, so that successful implementation has relied on the input of a range of partners on the ground and the maintenance of positive working relationships. The work has shown young people’s interest and capacities to take on more responsibility and have greater involvement in the design and delivery of programmes, if they are asked to do so, and supported appropriately. Continued engagement and work with young people would appear to be vital to sustain the emerging benefits.

Specific outcomes are:
- The direct sale of alcohol to those aged under-18 years old has reduced, although this has not necessarily reduced availability of alcohol for young people as proxy purchase remains an issue.

There is some evidence that demand for alcohol by young people has begun to be affected by this programme:
- Young people who are drinking in the community in Rosyth are now more aware of their personal safety and some young people have reported changes in their own behaviours in relation to drinking, including reduced consumption.
- Alcohol Brief Interventions delivered in community settings to young people, which are treated as a starting point of a further process of engagement and tailored support in school settings, show promise as a way of providing young people with the information, skills and support to reduce their alcohol consumption and reduce the risks associated with it.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) offences have fallen in all areas of Fife between 2008 and 2011. Fewer detected ASB offences are now committed by those aged under 21 years old in all areas of Fife, although this proportion remains slightly higher in Rosyth.

The focus on an area, especially such a small area, can contribute to a positive impact (rather than be attributed directly to it), although there may be some displacement of crime to neighbouring areas.

Informal feedback to the Police suggests that residents have been positive about the impact of focused interventions on ASB-related activity. FAPP partners believe that their efforts have made a contribution to these changes.

Tasking Team have supported relationship building and inter-professional dialogue and helped to tie various strands of work together in ways that would not have happened before. The relationships developed are the glue that makes the work a programme, rather than a disconnected or scattered series of interventions; they enable ‘new’ work to be tied into existing programmes and approaches, knowledge to be shared and progress sustained.

Outcomes of the programme in Touch

In Touch the focus on alcohol-related harm was useful and positive, particularly in galvanising local professionals to consider the needs of an area with little existing voluntary and community group infrastructure. The programme was less developed than in Rosyth and relied on the mobilisation of a wide number of mainstream agencies as well as some ‘new’ interventions and highlights the
challenges of community engagement and of building ‘connectivity’ across a programme.

Specific outcomes are:
- Rates of ASB offences for all the areas of direct interest to FAPP have all fallen between 2008-11: the most dramatic changes have been in Touch and Woodmill North, notably from 70.34 (per 1000) in 2009 to 19.35 in 2011.
- Local partners and community members suggest that Touch feels like a safer, more confident community, with less fear of crime. Whilst some issues remain, this success is widely attributed to the multiple strands of work of the Touch Tasking Team, in particular the Touch Tastic events and the developing trust between the agencies, particularly the Police and residents.
Definition of a multi-component programme
The adoption of a multi-component programme approach to tackling alcohol-related harm was based on research that suggested it would be helpful both in defining the nature of problems and designing appropriate local strategies. Whilst evidence for the effectiveness of such programmes was mixed, a growing international consensus was noted that they have a greater chance of success than stand-alone projects.

Research suggested that a multi-component programme approach should have the following features:¹

- a strategic framework with a theoretical basis for action
- the identification of problems defined at local levels
- a programme of co-ordinated projects to address the problem based on an integrated programme design, where single interventions run in combination with each other and/or sequentially together over time
- identification, mobilisation and co-ordination of appropriate agencies, stakeholders and local communities
- clearly defined outcomes and activities with measurable indicators and identified data sources to assess effectiveness for the programme as a whole and for individual projects or activities, and
- evaluation as an integral part of the programme from the start.

Summary of lessons
Whilst there is only limited evidence of the achievement of the outcomes sought by FAPP, there are many lessons arising from the pilot of a multi-component programme approach in Fife that may be valuable for others seeking to tackle alcohol-related harm.

Whilst not offered as a ‘blue-print’ for how to tackle alcohol-related harm, the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, the Police, the NHS and Health Boards, ADPs and the third sector should find valuable insights to inform their own thinking and action.

Consult with communities to understand the problems and shape the solutions
The original way in which FAPP defined the problem of alcohol-related harm was significantly altered by the community consultation in Touch: the concerns of local people about safety and security within the home and community influenced the way the problems were both defined and tackled. Their contributions to the safety and security elements of the Touch programme were one of the most successful elements of the programme. In Rosyth FAPP found that it was important to approach young people in the spirit of asking for their help and advice and seeking their involvement in the solutions, rather than appearing to be trying to tell them not to drink.

- It is important to address alcohol-related harm through a measured response that does not either under or over-play the significance of the issue in the community or for any sub-group, nor confine it to the territory of any specific professional group.
- Scoping of a programme should be a continual, collaborative and asset-focused process. It should identify provisional appropriate target areas as a starting point, based on statistical evidence and local intelligence, but be a consultative process that builds relationships and motivation to become involved in the development and delivery of the work.
- Community consultation should play a significant role in developing understandings of alcohol-related harm, devising shared solutions and mobilising local people, including young people, in influencing the service response. This should be built into the approach from the very start.
- Evaluation partners should also play a role from the very start of a programme. They can provide support for analysis of evidence and facilitate consultative processes.
- Recognising alcohol-related harm as a ‘community safety’ issue rather than necessarily a personal or family issue may be a productive, sensitive and non-stigmatising way to begin individual and community engagement.

✓ A non-judgemental approach which neither scolds nor celebrates young people’s stories is appreciated and helps them and others to be honest.

Co-develop a shared strategic, evidence-informed outcomes framework

The development of a strategic, evidence-informed framework is a crucial underpinning of a multi-component programme which sets out the desired outcomes. FAPP’s ambition in Fife was to be ‘additional and complementary’ to existing activities and services.

✓ Early collaboration with existing services and stakeholders is vital to understand their work and enable engagement with agencies and communities to co-design interventions that will enhance and complement their activities for shared outcomes.

✓ A clear lesson is that the way that the outcomes framework is developed and used is crucial to the effective implementation of the programme. Outcomes should not be imposed as if they were targets. Consideration of impact and implementation go hand in hand.

✓ Outcomes should be linked to existing frameworks and service agreements, including Single Outcome Agreements and the wider work of the ADP.

Recognise that a multi-component programme approach is a different way of working

A multi-component programme approach explicitly seeks connectivity between interventions that are designed to fit together or build on each other in some way, so that both successes and lessons can be built-on. Interventions might operate alongside each other or existing services concurrently, they could be developed sequentially built on what had gone before or thematically, developing an interest that could be shared across a number of different interventions.

✓ Connectivity and coordination can develop where there is local buy-in to overarching goals and a motivated and collaborative culture that mobilises agencies and resources in support of locally-generated outcomes and shared solutions. This is not about being ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ but taking a balanced approach that has a sense of purpose, but remains open to different perspectives and solutions.

✓ It is important not to be prescriptive or rush to initiate activities or interventions. Time and effort are needed to build and develop trust so that people can work together towards tackling a problem, rather than defending or protecting their own organisational territory, boundaries and budgets.

✓ A multi-component programme approach is an emergent way of working. It requires a high degree of trust, flexibility, adaptability and deftness of response. This is not business as usual; both individuals and their organisations need to be prepared to alter their approach, to try something different, to accept ‘failure’ and distil the lessons into the on-going programme.

✓ An explicit, permissive approach to organisational learning is likely to support the delivery of agency goals, rather than reliance on goodwill, individual compliance or personal flexibility, as well as generating lessons of wider relevance.

Use funding wisely for greatest effect and sustainability

The cost of the FAPP programme over three years was £0.405m. Just under a third of funding was spent on formal interventions with some receiving relatively small amounts of funding.

✓ Using money wisely to enhance existing programmes could have a greater and more sustainable effect by building on existing work, structures and relationships.

✓ An outcomes framework should be linked to a clear programme (rather than project) commissioning and management strategy.

✓ In a strong programmatic approach, commissioning should be the last resort. It could also be devolved to local partners to encourage their buy-in and promote greater transparency.
Consider the role and anticipated contribution of all partners including the drinks industry and the ADP

The involvement of the drinks industry in FAPP was clearly a new dimension to partnership working for some partners. Initial ambivalence and negative attitudes towards their involvement were part of some of the early difficulties of the partnership. Partners acknowledge that the industry brought commitment, energy and funding and noted that young people welcomed the opportunity to talk to people from the industry, as part of the consultation.

- The FAPP Steering Group proposes that it is likely to be beneficial to involve the industry in future responses to alcohol misuse, for example, through more formal involvement in the Fife ADP. The drinks industry is keen to be part of the solutions to alcohol-related harm.

- Clarity of roles is necessary across the board and a general lesson is that it is important to discuss the role and specific anticipated contribution of all partners openly from the earliest days of the partnership.

Talk to schools and link school and community interventions wherever possible

Alcohol-related harm is already addressed within schools in a number of ways, both within and outwith the classroom.

- Interventions may be most effective if they are able to build on the existing approach within the school. Schools should be consulted to enable appropriate responses to be designed.

- Attention should be paid to the prospects of enhancing school-based learning with community interventions and vice-versa as part of a programme approach.

Be strategic and intelligent in your choice of interventions

Combining intensive connected interventions which address enforcement and engagement is likely to be most effective. The most successful interventions were those that either involved multi-agency delivery so that successful implementation relies on the input of a range of partners on the ground and the maintenance of positive working relationships, or which were tied into a programme approach through good operational links with other elements of the programme.

Positive examples in Rosyth were joint training in ABIs, the Safer Neighbourhoods Team and on-going enforcement and engagement activities by Fife Constabulary, the Mobile Alcohol Intervention Team and Space Unlimited. Teach-It Alcohol Awareness and Space Unlimited both illustrated young people’s interest and capacities to take on more responsibility and have greater involvement in the design and delivery of programmes.

The Community Alcohol Partnership model that formed the original basis of the work in Rosyth has value if all elements of the approach (education, enforcement and public perceptions) are tackled together, bringing together mainstream services and additional interventions and including the perceptions and ideas of young people: as one partner commented ‘It’s bairns is the problem and bairns is the answer!’

In Touch, the most highly valued interventions have been the two Touch Tastic events and the programme of community safety and security measures. The Touch Action Group, instigated by Clued Up and Fife Council Community Learning & Development was also seen to be positive building on work within Woodmill High School. Home Start also demonstrated some valuable lessons in relation to engaging with families and raising alcohol-related issues. Annex 1 of the final report includes details of all interventions in each of the two programmes.

- When developing a programme, there may be no clear evidence of effectiveness for any particular intervention; given this, it is important to establish an agreed framework for clear decision-making to avoid arbitrariness and support intelligent choices of interventions. Good decisions can then be made ‘in good faith’ drawing on available evidence, plausible theory, the views of local professionals and crucially, communities themselves.

- Even the most ‘evidence-based’ intervention will only work if factors related to implementation are considered.
Interventions should be deployed that build on existing work, rather than adopting a ‘pick and mix’ approach.

Interventions need not be ‘new’ or experimental: there can be new value in combining interventions in a programme approach.

Training in Alcohol Brief Interventions or a similar course may assist a wide range of community-based and non-clinical staff to raise the subject of alcohol with others in a fair and skilful manner.

Any training provision should have a clear outcome focus. Multi-agency training, in preparation for co-delivery is particularly valuable.

The most effective engagement with alcohol retailers is that which provides support to meet their statutory responsibilities and is delivered on their premises.

Build evaluation into the programme process, commissioning and organisational learning

A positive ‘evaluation’ culture should be an integral part of an organisational learning approach to a multi-component programme from the start. It can help to drive the programme and build the necessary trust, working relationships and openness to challenge and having professional assumptions questioned.

All stakeholders need to be involved so that they have an understanding of what the on-going use and generation of evidence brings to the immediate and practical problems of developing shared solutions to complex problems of this nature.

With sufficient local ownership and buy-in to overarching aims of a programme, an embedded approach to evaluation should be built on an action research approach. This involves trying things out and, together, reflecting, adapting and re-testing, all in an intelligent, inclusive and systematic way.

Given the novelty of such an approach and attitudinal barriers to ‘evaluation’ using the language of action research, participation, continuous improvement, peer and self-review or reflective practice may be more productive and engaging.

Approaches to ‘evaluation’ must include mainstream services as well as any newly-funded interventions.

Use existing structures or establish new ones where multi-agency partners and communities can reflect on and learn from experience in ‘real-time’. It may be useful to continue to ask: how are we working together to tackle alcohol-related harm? Such an approach to dialogue and reflection could transform the way that partnership meetings are run.

Criteria for the judgement of ‘success’ should be developed in collaboration and include implementation milestones and outcome indicators. The report describes the use of ‘success factors’ to support better dialogue.

‘Evaluation’ partners or specialists are a key resource in the development of an outcomes framework, on-going scoping of the programme by all stakeholders and gathering evidence of effectiveness of both processes and outcomes.

Wherever possible, local partners should be engaged in the design and commissioning of the approach to evaluation and the choice of any external specialist support for the process.

The programme commissioning should link into the evaluation process so that decisions can be informed by evidence; commissioning authority might also be devolved to local partners to enhance this aspect of the approach.

A multi-component approach to tackle alcohol-related harm in communities: lessons from the Fife Alcohol Partnership Project, Cathy Sharp and Mark Bitel

September 2012
www.fassaction.org.uk
1. When are you ever not ‘piloting’? How action research can help to deliver better public services

Cathy Sharp, Research for Real, February 2012

Introduction

Current debates about redefining the relationship between public services and communities can sit uneasily at a time when it feels more important to focus on saving costs and retain essential services. Yet, there are some significant ideas being debated across the UK on the future delivery of public services; at their heart is the call for public services to be more responsive by involving individuals and communities in shaping the way services are designed and delivered. This short article is written in the hope of generating debate about how to do this. It is hoped to interest people from many kinds of organisations and communities. It points the way to the creation of an energising and ‘consumer-driven systemic logic by building-in inquiry’ into the fabric of the everyday practice of public services (Wadsworth, 2011).

Public service reform

People who work in public services and communities are hungry for ways to respond to the needs and rights of service users in more effective and sustainable ways. Many social problems appear to be resistant to change, are highly complex and uncertain, and involve a variety of different, dynamic and indirect relationships and interactions between people and organisations. Within almost any area of work, at both national and local level there are many strategies, plans, good practice guides, procedures and targets within a ‘cluttered landscape’ of partnerships. Yet, the expected improvements in outcomes have not always materialised and in some cases, inequalities have become worse. These situations have been described as ‘wicked’ in which no previously tried or known solution applies and no single party has ‘the answer’ (Grint, Undated).

In acknowledging these conditions of complexity and uncertainty, the discussion of public service reform has made the case for a focus on prevention and early intervention; a focus on ‘assets’ rather than deficits; and for new collaborative relationships to enhance outcomes and build resilience (Deacon, 2011) (GCPH, 2011). In Scotland, the Christie Commission called for a radical, new and collaborative culture (Christie Commission, 2011). The Scottish Community Development Centre has suggested that this is a critical point where decisions need to be taken on how best to equip public sector staff and key agencies with the skills and capacity to work with communities to ensure that resilience and capacity is built within the most disadvantaged communities to help them respond effectively to current economic conditions (SCDC, 2011). The IPPR and PWC suggest that the traditional model of public service delivery, predicated on people passively consuming services whenever they need them, is neither sustainable nor desirable (IPPR & PWC, 2010). These kinds of change are as much about changing mindsets as money.

There is now a wider understanding of why outcomes matter; of the need for clarity about the changes expected as a result of service efforts and recognition that it is rarely possible to deliver such results without working alongside others. Many people that use public services have plenty of

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2 www.research-for-real.co.uk
3 This term has been used widely. See Audit Scotland, Review of Community Health Partnerships, June 2011 http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/health/2011/nr_110602_chp.pdf
experience of being ‘done to’: of assumptions being made about their needs and capacities, of not being consulted, or where they have been, not really heard. The idea of ‘coproduction’ recognises and aims to combine and strengthen different kinds of knowledge and experience to develop more effective solutions and shift the balance of power from the professional towards the service user (Boyle, D., Coote, A., Sherwood, C., & Slay, J, 2010). In discussing the changing role of professionals in this context, others have suggested that professionals should see themselves as ‘Sherpas, increasingly looking to provide options and guidance, rather than definitive answers’ or have talked about ‘working with people, rather than simply processing them’.

These debates focusing on service coproduction suggest a significant cultural shift requiring skills of enabling and facilitation, as well as the ability to change systems and operate on a large scale.

How can we create effective whole system change?

In responding to the Christie Commission report the Scottish Government called for leaders of Community Planning Partnerships to ‘disrespect boundaries’ between public services and focus on the achievement of shared outcomes and cross-sectoral workforce development strategies (Scottish Government, 2011). This is a huge challenge and despite the recognition of the need for a cultural shift little has been said about how to bring such change about.

Danny Burns has argued that effective whole system change has to be ‘underpinned by multi-stakeholder analysis, experimental action, experiential learning and systematic inquiry’ (Burns, 2007). Similarly, Yoland Wadsworth identifies the act of inquiring as the dynamic of every living system; by ‘inquiring full circle’ through observation, analysis, evaluative judgement, reflection and new theory-building, then further planning and ‘experimenting’ in practice (Wadsworth, 2011). In other words, it’s important to try things out and reflect, adapt and try again and to do this in an intelligent, inclusive and systematic way. There is a risk of being dismissive of analysis and of seeing this kind of attention to process as at odds with working with people or simply getting on with the job. But this is what working differently might look like and can hold the key to developing new knowledge and an adaptive, collaborative and improvisational skill-set, able to respond in new ways to systemic and complex problems on the ground. This takes us into more promising territory: a critical question is how to locate knowledge co-production or inquiry-based learning and action at the heart of policy-making and public services (Sharp, 2011).

Bridging the gap between knowing and doing

In case this sounds like a researcher saying ‘let’s have more research’, consider what we know about the role of evidence in informing change. In many areas of public policy, there is, literally, a weight of evidence about ‘what works’. Yet, that evidence about ‘what works’ is often failing to become good practice. Many public service systems are ‘data-rich, but knowledge poor’ (Sharp, 2005). Even research enthusiasts cannot keep up with the volumes of reports, profiles and summaries. Some of this evidence makes its way into guidance, procedures and protocols and much of this store of knowledge remains unread and underused. It is too readily dismissed as fixed in time or location and detached from the real and messy world of practice. At other times, there’s anxiousness to ‘prove’ the efficacy of a particular intervention to justify funding. There have been countless evaluations of ‘pilot’ programmes, test sites or pathfinders although the programmes are rarely rolled out. Valuable resources have been spent on finding evidence of need and effectiveness, yet change seems to be stubborn and slow.

Wider debates about research use and impact have recognised the complexity and contingent nature of research use and suggest that research is more likely to be ‘translated and transformed not simply transferred’ (Nutley, 2007). So whilst it’s important not to oversimplify these debates, our ways of approaching the use and generation of evidence have certainly not served us well and have played their part in the problem. The way that research has conventionally been organised and commissioned has separated the users and producers of research rather than making it an integrated learning process. Future funding for evidence gathering is likely to be severely limited, but in any case, it is clear that there cannot be business as usual.

A ‘knowledge co-production’ approach values professional expertise alongside the knowledge that comes from personal experience; real transformative change comes from combining all kinds of expertise. This is a desirable and necessary response to the kind of complex situations and challenges that are faced and takes the agenda beyond ‘service user involvement’, which has often been important as a symbolic statement of organisational intent, but too commonly has left the underlying cultures undisturbed.

**Locating research in action**

So what might be done differently? Current debates about co-production have focused on service design and delivery and have neglected the implications of and for our ways of using and generating evidence. Research has traditionally been thought of as a way of defining problems and providing answers. Locating research in action can help people to learn to ask good questions, to listen, make collective sense of evidence and work out together what to do next. Crucially, it can be a way to keep doing all of this, to deal with the ever changing and complex situations in which we find ourselves.

Action research has been identified as a positive response to the challenges of moving research into practice. Yoland Wadsworth describes how research can provide evidence of the value and processes by which service systems can move towards a consumer-driven systemic logic — beyond the rhetoric of user involvement — and crucially can cut ‘new and controversial ground’ in understandings about what consumers can contribute (Wadsworth, 2011, p. 209). From elsewhere, the idea of service users as ‘quality detectives’ is powerful (Bate, P and Robert, G, 2007, p. 1). Other valuable commentaries are available on the integration of research into practice; experience-based design is a user-focused design process with the goal of making user experience accessible to the designers, so that they can design experiences, rather than services (Bate, P and Robert, G, 2007, p. 9).

These kinds of integrated and continuous inquiry processes can breathe life into programmes and interventions, by creating space and time to talk to each other, ask good questions, work across boundaries and become more effective in our joint efforts. This is not always about starting from scratch: it can be about how best to adapt or customise evidence-based interventions or programmes (transferred from elsewhere) as well as providing new evidence of how things are working in the new context. There are many different possible approaches (Sharp, 2005, p. Annexes & Table 5.1). It may help to think of it like this: the point of research can be about ‘talking to each other about what we ought to be doing’. Here there’s an emphasis on dialogue, collaboration, purpose, values and action. It’s an approach to learning (and unlearning) that recognises that

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people learn best from ‘doing’, from trying things out and reflecting on the effects they create. They do this best in collaboration with others with a perspective to offer and a stake in the outcome. This is a way of integrating planning, action, observation and reflection to ensure that inquiry-based learning and action are at the heart of the policy making process and the delivery of public services.

The basic principles of action research
There are some crucial and important differences to the conduct of conventional social science research and evaluation. Such a reflective, relational and emergent process also differs in important ways from conventional thinking about participatory research (which can still be research about action, rather than in action). Whilst there is no single definition of action research and many approaches within the action research family, at its best, it is:

- **Contextually rooted and action focused**: it is rooted in the local particular context. Those most closely involved in the situation determine what is of importance. **The FOCUS IS ON TRIALLING, TESTING AND REFINING REAL OUTCOMES.**

- **Driven by purpose and values**: those most closely involved articulate the purpose and values of the inquiry process, including quality criteria by which the success and quality of the inquiry should be judged.

- **Appreciative**: It recognises strengths and assets as a starting point for inquiry, and builds resilience and capacity through the process.

- **Collaborative**: The inquiry is aligned with the critical interests of those most likely to benefit. **Former ‘RESEARCH SUBJECTS’ BECOME ACTIVE CO-RESEARCHERS.** External specialists may have specific roles, but their perspectives are not privileged.

- **Inclusive of all kinds of knowing**: it draws on the particular experiences and ‘knowing’ of those most immersed in a particular situation. It recognises the importance of sharing knowledge and of creating the right climate for dialogue, so that differences in perspectives can be safely expressed and explored.

- **Emergent and open**: The main concern is to allow meaning and interpretation to evolve and change as the work proceeds. The focus of the inquiry can adapt to what emerges; the concern is not with prediction and control. There is interest in the unintended consequences of actions and openness to new information and understandings which challenge underlying assumptions. **This can encourage greater awareness of the ways that people and organisations think that inhibit their capacity to act in congruence with their expressed purpose.**

- **Real-time experimental**: it recognises that any well-grounded knowledge is always experimental ‘working knowledge’, adequate for the moment and open to further testing and refining. **Learning and feedback is a continuous process.** It may draw down ‘propositional’ knowledge from previous research and literature to test it out and generate new theories.

*When are you ever not piloting?*
There are examples that show that with the right structures and processes, it is possible to encourage an appetite to engage in all aspects of the ‘evaluation’ process because it is seen as directly relevant to the problems of daily practice (Burns, 2007) (Wadsworth, 2011) (Sharp, C and Jones, J with Humphreys, C and Netto, G, 2011). It is worth noting that the Magenta Book which
provides Government guidance on evaluation in public policy proposes a number of situations when action research might prove particularly useful. (With my emphasis) these are when a novel way of working or delivering an intervention is being implemented; when a policy is based on a new or unproven theory of change; when there are a number of feasible alternative options for delivering a policy and it would be helpful to test them; or when a policy is being delivered in a challenging implementation environment (HM Treasury, 2011). In many contexts, it is hard to imagine situations where one or more of these conditions do not hold. Debates about evidence use and generation suggest it’s worth asking “When are you ever not ‘piloting’?” (Sharp, 2011a) Questions about how we should act and what difference we are making will always be with us.

**Ten tips for getting started**

These activities should involve people who use services or whom might be expected to do so, service managers, practitioners and research specialists.

**Multi-stakeholder analysis**

1. It is important to build inquiry in from the very earliest stages of thinking about an intervention or programme. Find an issue that matters, where there is a strong impetus to improve a social situation. Work out who ‘we’ are - those that have an initial ‘stake’ in the issues and how each see the situation. Be prepared to revise your initial view of who are the ‘stakeholders’.

2. Create the right climate for inquiry from the start. Talk about values and purpose. Decide what your collective, shared or distinct views of success are likely to be and what, when you look back, will convince you that your efforts have been worthwhile.

3. Get a clear and strong commitment to the process from senior managers. It can be helpful to explicitly give ‘permission’ for people to experiment, without being prescriptive about exactly what they should do.

**Experimental action**

4. Treat your efforts as a pilot, experiment or some other term that conveys tentativeness and openness to alternative types of thinking, choice and action.

5. Start small. Find some enthusiasts and work with them; expand or grow the inquiry by building on early insights and themes. Link local inquiries up wherever possible to illuminate the lessons across a whole system, whether the organisation or community.

**Experiential learning**

6. Commit to and protect time out from routine activities for reflection on action.

7. Value the stories that people tell. Encourage them and find ways to make the telling, sharing and analysis of experience a routine part of the work. Make sense of them together and don’t dismiss an isolated episode. Notice and explore puzzles, paradoxes or tensions.

8. Always think about what voices are missing and find ways to bring in other perspectives and ways to check out different views of ‘reality’.

**Systematic inquiry**

9. Make use of existing opportunities and teams to build in an inquiry focus and supplement them with ways of bringing local teams and structures together to provide a bigger picture. Be prepared to be flexible and alter your approach as you learn.
10. Think about how to use external research specialists in more facilitative and advisory roles. For example, digesting literature, providing critical challenge, collecting or handling data, brokering, facilitation of group processes, or writing reports.

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