

# Building the Right Small Supports Evaluation Report

Victoria Mason-Angelow

August 2020





**National Development Team for Inclusion**

First Floor  
30-32 Westgate Buildings  
Bath BA1 1EF  
T: 01225 789135  
F: 01225 338017

[www.ndti.org.uk](http://www.ndti.org.uk)

---

***With thanks to:***

*The evaluation team would like to thank all the Building the Right Small Supports delivery team for the time they gave to the evaluation and the knowledge they shared. We would also like to thank each of the Transforming Care Partnership sites that have engaged with the evaluation both online and in person.*

---



## Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. WHAT'S WORKING WELL?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THE PROGRAMME FACE?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. REFLECTIONS ON DELIVERY</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. THE BIGGER PICTURE</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>13</b>



## 1. Introduction

The Building the Right Small Supports Programme (BRSS), funded by NHS England and the Local Government Association (LGA), is being delivered by NDTi in partnership with Beyond Limits, C-Change and Positive Support for You. The programme's vision is for people with learning disabilities and/or autism who have 'hefty reputations' (people who are burdened by the reputations they have been given because of behaviours, reactions, support requirements, and large funding packages) to get support that's right for them and provides them with a choice about where they live and what they do.

Due to the bespoke nature of small supports, it is hard to define exactly what they are, but they do have some common characteristics, including; planning and delivering in a truly person centred way; person led staff recruitment and training; structuring and using funding around the person; a separation of housing and support; strong partnerships between the individual and family, commissioners, and providers; and staying small.

The programme is delivering four strands of activity (on going from April 2019):

1. **An online network** to connect small supports organisations to offer mutual support and maintain a benchmark of quality.
2. **Recruiting 8 new sites** who want to take this approach in order to widen the market offer.
3. **Residential and cross site learning days** to share learning.
4. **A business school** to support small support providers with information around financial process, funding, structures, and monitoring.

This report evaluates strands 2 and 3 of the programme.



### The aims of this evaluation:

- to engage with sites that have attended the programme learning days to find out how these days have helped them understand or change the offer in their local area.
- to engage with those delivering the BRSS programme to find out:
  - What has worked well
  - What has proved challenging
- to use this learning to develop recommendations for future work in this area.

To reach these aims, we gathered data from the following sources:



**Online Survey completed by 3 sites** who had attended one or more BRSS learning days, to hear about what they learnt, what they would like to have learnt and what their next steps are.



**Telephone interview with 1 site** who had completed the online survey and wished to share more of their experiences and learning.



**Telephone interviews with 5 members of the delivery team** (NDTi and partners) to hear about what is working well, what is challenging about the programme, and their recommendations for the future.



**Final Workshop** where BRSS sites and partners discussed their learning and experiences of the programme.



## 2. What's working well?

Based on information provided by sites engaged with the programme and delivery team members (NDTi and partners), there are 4 key elements that help the BRSS programme work in local areas.



### The right people with the right mindset

Having the right people in a Local Authority (LA) or Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) sign up to the programme is fundamental to its success. This includes having the Senior Responsible Officers (SRO) and procurement teams signed up, as well as those people who might not be in a traditional position of 'power' but who 'get' the programme and what it aims to do; this combination leads to an *'incredible energy being in the room and invaluable learning taking place.'*

*The right people will take the idea and run with it, going above and beyond what could be considered their role to promote the idea and really create change in an area.*

*We've had commissioners manning a stall at the local market on a Saturday to promote Small Supports, that's dedication!*



### The right content

Having content that is engaging, inspiring and thought provoking is key to ensuring LAs/CCGs who've signed up to the programme fully understand what Small Supports are, who they are meant for, and what they mean to people with learning disabilities and/or autism and their families.

The design of the learning days allows the delivery team to do just this, by *'unpeeling the programme like an onion'* in a meaningful but challenging way for attendees.

*We are using techniques that reignite old and tired conversations about support...the session on marketing from a business perspective was fascinating to watch, you could see lightbulbs go on around the room. That combined with the stories from people with learning disabilities themselves really shifted their thinking.*

The involvement of people with learning disabilities and/or autism, family members, current small support providers and non-traditional health and social care professionals (such as marketing professionals) in the design and delivery of these days is fundamental.



### Peer support and sharing knowledge

Enabling the LAs/CCGs that sign up to the programme to engage with one another, share knowledge and provide mutual support is invaluable. The sites involved in this phase of the programme, have relished being able to get together and share knowledge about what they are doing, the challenges they are facing, the solutions they have found and their plans for the future. This networking not only provided sites with a forum to share their wins and vent their frustrations, but also provided them with evidence to progress their small supports offer, and provided the delivery team with novel insights to draw on in the development of the programme for the future.

*Working with the others has been really useful. It's like doing a dot to dot, each time we meet we get more of the picture.*



### Building confidence

The LAs/CCGs signed up to the programme need support to feel confident in reimagining support for people with learning disabilities and/or autism in their locality, as well as the commissioning and procurement systems that surround these services. At present, the programme's structure, content and delivery has been uniquely designed to create and instil this confidence in attendees. The knowledge individuals gain through their involvement in the programme, from the formal content shared by delivery partners, to the informal content shared between participants, has seen each site grow exponentially in confidence.

As will be discussed in section 3, the small supports programme is challenging because it requires both commissioning processes and the provider markets to change beyond recognition. Acknowledging this challenge and progressing a local small supports offer requires confidence, but due to the way the programme has been designed, each site now appears confident enough to take this on and real progress is being made.

*...now I've got the confidence to be a passionate campaigner to get everyone in the local area listening and on board with this!*



### 3. What challenges does the programme face?

Both the sites engaged with the programme and those delivering it (NDTi and partners), talked candidly about the challenges they have faced as part of the programme. These have been grouped into 5 key areas to be addressed.



#### Trying to change the world

The programme is trying to change the world of service provision; its aim is to turn the commissioning process on its head and to alter the provider market in local areas. This is a huge ask and whilst all involved fundamentally believe that this needs to happen, they feel that the aims of the programme are somewhat naïve given the timescale and funds available. This participant suggests having more time to bring about the change intended would see greater ‘success’ in sites (a local offer leading to small support services being set up and people with learning disabilities and/or autism being introduced to them) than is seen at present:

*The focus of the work is bang on, but it doesn't have the authority, time or money to make real change. If anything, all the programme has done is unearth how huge the problem is and how many of these are outside the remit of the programme – commissioning being detached from delivery with a focus on procurement that is wedded to traditional ways of providing services. This means the visioning process needed for the programme to work in an area is limited and really needs time to unpick, challenge and change.*



#### Getting the right people involved

Having the right LAs/CCGs and the right people within them sign up to the programme is crucial to its success. Having struggling Transforming Care Partnership (TCP) sites involved in the programme has proved extremely challenging for the delivery team because:

- the sites often have poor leadership and limited buy-in to the programme,
- those who attend the learning days don't understand the programme and/or don't have the ability to do anything with the learning,
- there is poor engagement with the programme throughout, and
- limited resources to create a local offer.



However, these issues of engagement and commitment to a local offer are not unique to struggling TCP sites; other sites have also faced difficulties in these areas where buy-in at the outset was not in place. In these instances, the right people were not around the table at the start – no SROs, procurement or senior commissioners. These individuals need to be engaged and supportive of the programme from the outset for the programme to be successful in that locality.

*Sites are complex, where they are at, who has the control, and what they are prepared to do really needs to be checked at the start. Some sites might not be right, some might need a bit of support to get there, and some might be ready to go; we need to be clear about who we are working with and what we want to achieve.*



### **Money, money, money**

Money is a key challenge for the programme's success. For sites, their greatest struggle was to get procurement onboard with allowing new small supports to be commissioned 'off framework'. Some sites also found the issue of tripartite contracting that's required for small supports to be an issue, with procurement needing educating on how such contracts work. Ensuring SRO and procurement buy-in from the outset will go some way to addressing these challenges, as will ensuring contracting is covered in the course content.

Whilst not a key focus of this evaluation, money has also been raised as an issue for potential new small support providers. The programme currently lacks engagement with financial organisations that can help and support potential new support providers in a meaningful way. This is a challenge to the whole programme (not just strand 4, p. 4) as if potential new small support providers are not sign posted to organisations that can help them develop with confidence, then it is unlikely they will come to fruition. Some delivery partners have struck up relationships with financial support services, such as Lloyds Bank Foundation and the School for Social Entrepreneurs, which should be strengthened and embedded in the programme more widely in the future.

Again, although not a focus of this evaluation, money is also an issue for many people with learning disabilities and/or autism who would like support from a small support organisation. That is, TUPE regulations can apply to the staff who are currently supporting someone with a learning disability and/or autism who wishes to move to a small support service provider. If this happens, it can mean that an individual is left being supported by staff that they did not like for a significant period of time in their small support. Whilst the solution to this situation reaches beyond the scope of the programme, it is a significant issue that needs addressing in the programme.



## The myths of commissioning

The delivery team found they had to spend a lot of time working with sites to de-bunk the myths about commissioning services and LA/CCG legal duties. One of the key issues/concerns from sites was the hearsay stories circulating about larger providers bringing legal challenges against LAs who commission services 'off framework'.

Whilst this is not a challenge to the programme itself, it is a challenge to the concept of small supports and something that the programme needs to address.

*We seemed to spend a lot of time coming back to the issues of commissioning services 'off framework'. There is a paralyzing fear in some areas about legal challenges that simply won't happen if the processes are managed properly. I think having a full session on this could be useful, less time consuming than the repetitive conversations we keep having and will maybe move things forward?*



## A lack of worked examples

Several sites felt that the content of the programme lacked concrete examples that directly addressed the challenges they were facing when setting up their local offer. Sites found this disappointing and would like this to be addressed. Embedding the challenges sites involved in this evaluation have faced into the content of future programmes would go some way to addressing this.

*The Programme was not able to provide worked examples addressing some of the challenges we have experienced commissioning more complex community care - this was around bridging the gap for small providers who wanted to access local frameworks but were unable to provide the requirements as a new business. As a follow-up to one of the events, we asked for some example case studies, and had a specific question about working with providers. We have had had no response.*



## 4. Reflections on delivery

The things that worked well in the delivery of the programme are:



### Involving experts

Having the personal stories and insights from people with learning disabilities and/or autism, family members and those who have experience of setting up and running small support services, embedded in the programme has been extremely important. These real-life stories have helped sites understand why small supports are vital to the cohort of people the programme is focussed on, as well as debunking myths about commissioning requirements and thus allowing change to happen.



### Good relationships

The good relationships between NDTi, Beyond Limits, C-Change and Positive Support for You, have been fundamental to the effective delivery of the programme. Where there have been good relationships between the delivery team and sites, progress is reported to have been made more easily and at greater speed.

The things that have proved challenging to delivery are:



### Organisation

The organisation of the programme delivery has been a little disjointed at times. For example, the wrong dates and times were sent to participant sites and delivery partners on a number of occasions, which proved challenging for all concerned.



### Allocated site days

The lack of clearly defined options for how allocated site days could be used, proved challenging for sites and the delivery team alike. Sites were not sure what to use their allotted days for which, in some cases, led to the delivery team having to press sites to use their days, only to have this offer turned down or accepted and wasted due to a lack of clear purpose.



### Not having all the answers

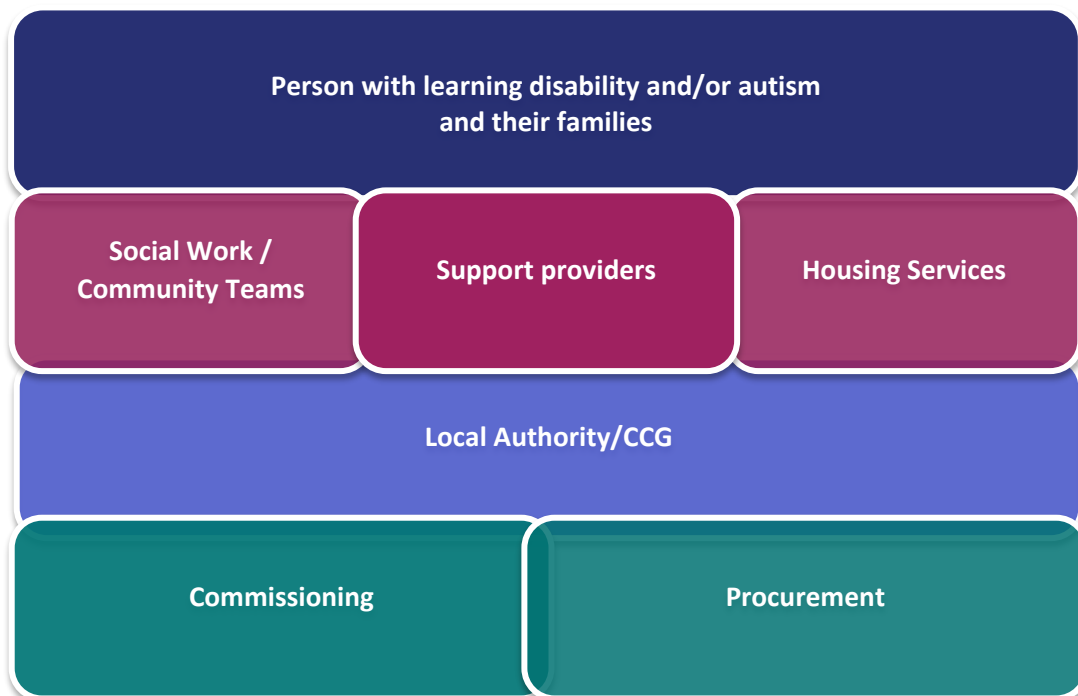
There are some areas that the delivery team were not able to address in the programme due to a lack of knowledge in an area, or due to the lack of engagement with particular expert presenters (such as, commissioners, procurement, financial advisors etc.) that would have been beneficial.



## 5. The bigger picture

Data from evaluation participants has painted a picture of who has to be involved for a local small supports offer to work in an area. This is illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Who needs to be involved to make small supports happen?





## 6. Recommendations

Based on the data collected for this evaluation, the following recommendations could help subsequent stages of the Building the Right Small Supports programme overcome some of the challenges it faces and strengthen its assets.

- ❖ **In its current format, this programme is not deemed appropriate for Transforming Care Partnership (TCP) sites that are struggling.** A different version of the programme may be useful to these sites, but their participation must be based upon honest conversations about the programme's focus, what is expected of them and what their involvement must be. It is recommended that the sign-up process detailed below is used for these sites, but the content delivered is tailored to the site's specific challenges and needs.
- ❖ **Sites should be introduced to the programme via their TCP board meetings,** where both SROs and procurement teams are present. This introduction should include: what the programme is about, who it is focussed on (cohort of people to be supported), what being involved entails, who must be engaged, risk management, marketing and intended outcomes.
- ❖ **Interested sites, should undergo a thorough readiness check before signing up to the programme.** This check may involve some exploratory work being undertaken to decide whether they are ready to take part. If a site is not ready to take part, it is recommended that the delivery team offer support and guidance to these sites to help them get to position where they can sign up to the programme in the future.
- ❖ Once a successful readiness check has been completed, **sites should sign up to the programme, agreeing to fully engage with it,** communicate clearly and effectively with their assigned member of the delivery team, attend all of the information and learning days, utilise their support days for the betterment of their offer, share their learning with other sites, and agree to the timescales of the programme.
- ❖ **The programme should maximise its business links** (i.e. marketing professionals) and develop more sessions utilising this approach. They should also increase the input of people with learning disabilities and/or autism and family members, and small support providers to the development and delivery of programme.
- ❖ **The programme should engage with social entrepreneur organisations, colleges and financial support organisations** (i.e. Lloyds Bank Foundation, School for Social Entrepreneurs etc.). This will not only help new potential providers but will also allow sites to understand new provider needs and how its practices can help support them.

- ❖ **Sharing learning is vital** to making this programme work and sites relish the opportunity to hear from others about how they are working and what they are doing. More ways of sharing information between sites should be included in subsequent programmes. Sharing learning from the sites involved in the programme for this evaluation is also recommended.
- ❖ The programme should introduce a session at one of its learning days that specifically focuses on **de-bunking the myths of commissioning and procurement**.

Finally, from the conversations undertaken in this evaluation, it is recommended that NDTi and partners continue to support the sites who have fully engaged with the programme and have made strides towards introducing small supports to their local provider market.

Getting to this stage has taken a great deal of work, courageous leadership, passion and confidence that should continue to be supported and encouraged. This is felt to be particularly important in the current climate where the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to see the pressures on LAs/CCGs increase to such an extent that novel approaches to support provision may fall to the wayside.