BUILDING BLOCKS FOR COORDINATION

The Children's Society

Coordinated Community Support.

CLOUD CHAMBER
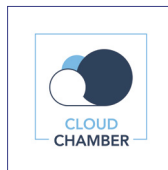
Coordination

Sustained funding to provide the capacity to support the local network and a digital referral system.

DIGITAL REFERRAL SYSTEM

LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT & FACILITATION

To drive the development, growth and use of the network and the digital referral system.

NETWORK

CAPACITY

A group of people and organisations **who want to work together** to improve outcomes for people in their area. They should have a shared vision for how their services work together.

Funding for services and organisations providing advice and support – coordination itself is not a substitute for funding local services. Often services are already stretched and coordination alone will not solve this problem.

A coordinated network requires investment and leadership – it does not happen on its own. The building blocks of coordination include: a motivated network, supported by a digital referral system, and with sustained capacity and leadership.

Network LED SYSTEM

"A network of agencies with a strong track record of communication is the foundation for effective coordination".

In your area, is there a network of agencies who are motivated to work together to achieve better outcomes for the community?

NO — — — — — — — — — — **YES**

Consider the following

Are there a group of agencies who already work closely together who might be interested in founding a network of advice agencies or crisis support agencies?

Do you and your peers understand the barriers to collaborative working in your locality and what steps can you take to address these?

Are there any existing networks in your locality that might be interested in driving an improved referral system?

Do you know what referral process are already available in your area? And in your neighbouring local authorities areas?

Talk through the following questions with the network

Do members of the network have capacity to make the time for strategic work? Are members of the network committed to investing some time in the short term to save time in the longer term?

Is there shared recognition that working together will be beneficial for community members (especially people who use crisis support services)?

Are there some members of the network who are committed to progressing the development of a digital referral system?

Is the network representative of the services available in the area? If not, what can be done to bring other agencies into the network?

Are relevant local authority teams at the table and demonstrating a commitment to using a digital referral system?

Does the network have a track record of working together and communicating well?

In the CCS Programme, networks were primarily made up of advice agencies in the first instance. This feels like a good place to start because advice agencies already refer / signpost frequently and therefore understand the benefits of robust and easy referrals. Advice networks may be a good place to start in your area but it is important to stress that other types of services (e.g. furniture and food provision) should also be welcomed into the network too.

STEPS INVOLVED
IN BUILDING A

DIGITAL
REFERRAL
SYSTEM

The Children's Society

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CLOUD CHAMBER

WHAT IS A
Digital Referral System?

A digital referral system offers agencies the ability to make robust, accountable referrals between services.
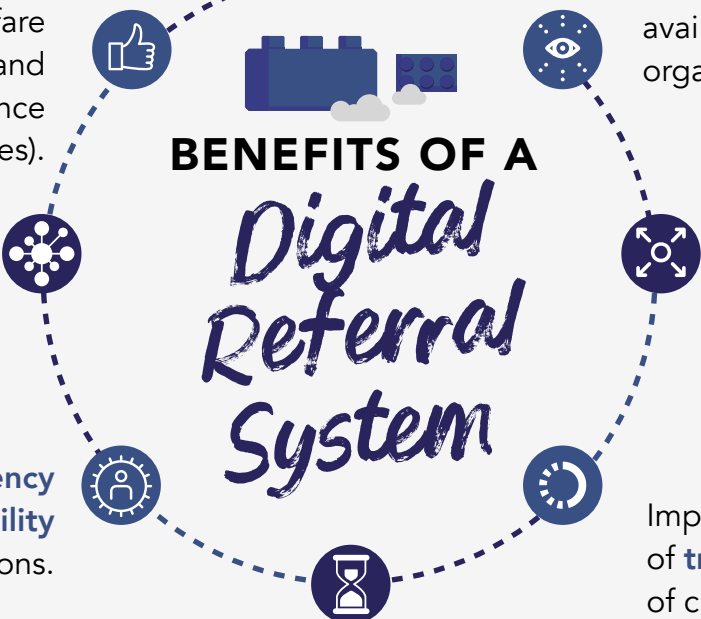
The system allows professionals to directly refer people, rather than signposting. This makes it easier for people to access services and support. Even the smallest organisations and teams with limited capacity can use a digital referral system, as they have complete control over who they receive referrals from and when. This ensures no organisation is overwhelmed with referrals they are unable to manage and allows all partners to engage with a volume of referrals which matches their capacity.

ACCESS APPROVED

£738.00

BENEFITS OF A
Digital Referral System
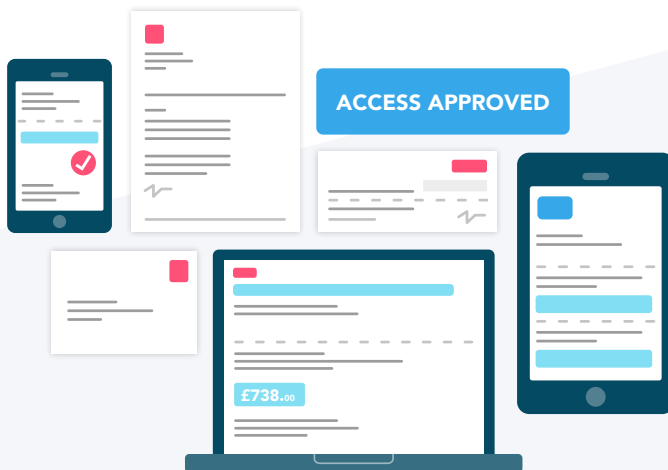
Supporting **uptake of benefits and support** such as Local Welfare Assistance (in England) and Discretionary Assistance Fund (in Wales).

Improving **data** about community needs to support evidence-based planning.

Improving **transparency** and **accountability** between organisations.

Increasing **awareness** of the breadth of services available amongst referring organisations.

Empowers smaller organisations to **manage their capacity** by controlling the flow of referrals.

Improving the process of **tracking progress** of clients / customers over time and between organisations.

Supporting advice professionals to work efficiently, **saving time.**

THE PHASES OF BUILDING A
Digital Referral System?

Establishing a digital referral system will look different in each area depending on where you are at with your network. The CCS Programme identified the following phases (the 4 E's).

Evaluation

The data generated by a referral system can be powerful and help inform decision making including commissioning cycles.

Extension

This is where organisations who maybe have limited experience of making referrals are invited to join this system.

Examples include schools, foodbanks and volunteer-led community services. It is important to remember that they may need additional support to understand the value of the system and to make robust, quality referrals.
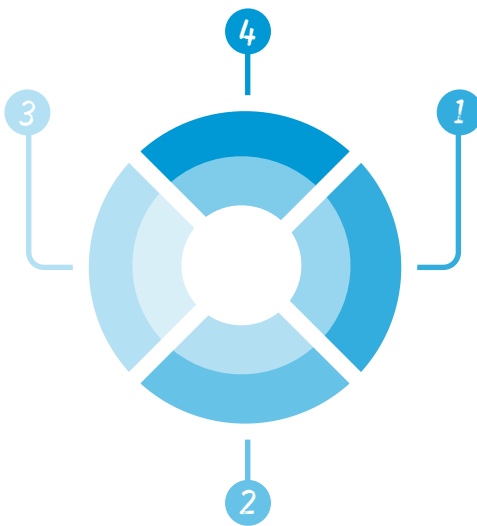
Engagement

This is where a core group of organisations get together to design and pilot the system.

This is usually a group of organisations who already know one another and have a track record of referring to one another. Ideally this will include some of the larger advice agencies in the area and a local authority team (such as the team that administers Local Welfare Assistance or Discretionary Assistance Fund). The Engagement phase is reviewed before inviting new members to join.

Expansion

This is where additional members are onboarded onto the system. This may include other advice agencies and/or services that support people in crisis.

SUSTAINING THE
Digital Referral System

Building a digital referral system and improving coordination requires resource. We have seen how investment in a system can lead to efficiency gains amongst partner organisations.

The following guidelines might be helpful if you are planning for a system.

BUDGETING

- Budgets should include both development time and staffing time.

- As the number of users on the referral system increases, it is likely that the amount of staff time required to provide training and support will also increase – staffing costs are likely to go up.

- As an indication, a minimum staffing level is around 1 full time equivalent (FTE) for a borough new to the digital referral system. For a more established, larger network of users around 3-4 FTEs might be required. Based on learning from the CCS Programme, a budget of around £50k per year is needed for the development and ongoing support of a digital referral system.

THINGS TO REMEMBER when growing the network and increasing system users.

- The digital referral system shouldn't be presented to new users as mandatory or something they must do. Approach it collaboratively and listen to what partners want to get out of it.

- Some partners might not understand the value straight away. It may take a while to sell the benefits.

- Adopting a referral system will also require a 'letting go' of informal or alternative referral processes such as phone calls and emails. There needs to be a willingness to say no to more informal referral pathways. For some partners this is a difficult process.

Leadership, management
AND FACILITATION

Networks of agencies (such as advice agencies) often lead and drive the implementation of a digital referral system.

We also found that some ownership, management and facilitation of the system works well when one agency can take this on. Identifying the right managing agency needs careful consideration. Factors in establishing strong referral system management and facilitation include:

Having a **VCS partner manage the system** is often well received.

The managing organisation needs to **strongly advocate the role of the digital referral system** within local authorities.

The managing partner should be an **active member of the network** (described above).

The managing partner needs to have **ambition to grow the system** and encourage more and more users to get onboard. Need to commit to long-term training, retraining, onboarding new members.

The managing organisation needs to have **credibility amongst other VCS organisations** including large and small.

A managing organisation will be responsible for **administration, onboarding, training and growth of the system**. But they should be heavily supported by other members of the network.

In some areas, a steering group of the network is formed to **give some direction and leadership to the managing partner.**

THE BENEFITS OF

COORDINATED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Improving coordination ensures people are more likely to get the advice and support they need more quickly, without 'bouncing around' between services.

The Children's Society

Coordinated Community Support.

CLOUD CHAMBER
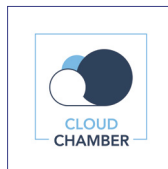
Benefits for People
WHO NEED SUPPORT

1

People will have improved access to a wider variety of advice and support from a range of service providers. People will benefit from a joined-up approach, meaning that there is 'no wrong door' when they need support.

2

People are more likely to be able to access a more comprehensive range of responses, experts and services. Coordination allows professionals to connect people with a range of advice and support for a variety of issues.

3

If people need additional help (beyond an immediate need), organisations can refer them quickly, securely, and in a dignified way to others in the network who are best placed to help them.

COORDINATION

MAXIMISES the likelihood that people will receive the most appropriate support regardless of where they initially present. Coordination of services supports people to navigate a very complex system and access the best services to meet their needs.

MINIMISES the risk that people fall through the gaps or are told that they've been knocking on the wrong door all along.

Benefits for Professionals

(including staff or volunteers)
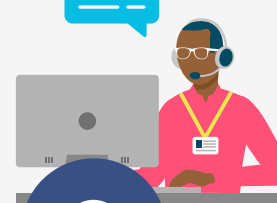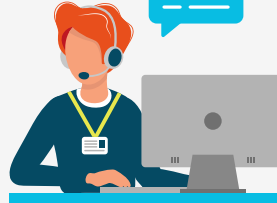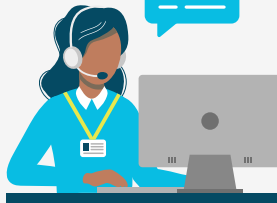## WHO ARE INVOLVED IN PROVIDING SUPPORT

1 Increased **efficiency** – the up-to-date directory in the referral system saves professionals' time in identifying the right service to refer their clients to.

2 Increased **awareness** of services available that can offer different types of advice, help and support.

3 The opportunity to **share the load** between organisations. Services could have the ability to 'turn off' new referrals when they are at full capacity while having confidence that any such referrals could be passed to another organisations.

4 Improved **shared intelligence** about arising local support needs which can be used to identify trends and support strategic service planning.

Improving coordination takes time and resource – there is a cost involved. But, as the points above illustrate, professionals report improved efficiencies and a good return on investment.
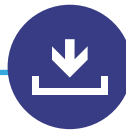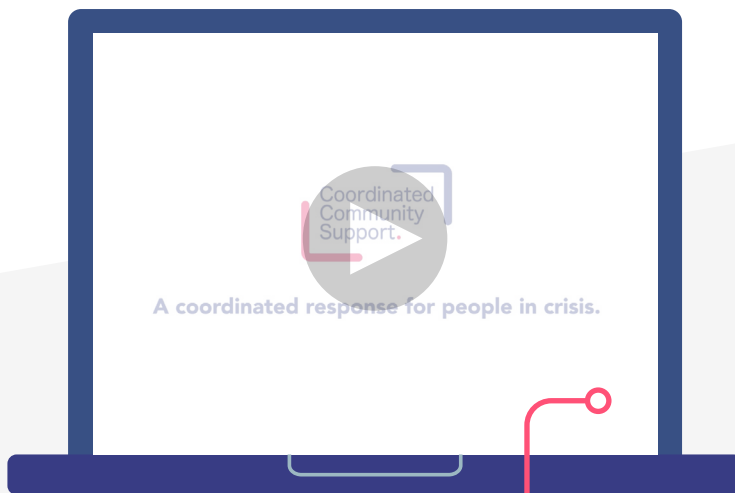
Context

The Children's Society (TCS), in partnership with Buttle UK, the Lloyds Bank Foundation, Children in Need, The Church of England, The Legal Education Foundation, The Local Government Association (LGA), Trust for London, Smallwood Trust, Stepchange and Trussell Trust, delivered the Coordinated Community Support (CCS) Programme between 2019-2022.

The Programme's goal was to improve coordination of local services to reduce repeat instances of financial crisis by addressing underlying causes of crises, as well as the immediate crisis.

The CCS Programme has worked in four local areas to improve coordination between locally-based agencies providing support (including grant support, advice, legal support, access to food and other services) to people in financial crisis.

Coordinated Community Support.

A coordinated response for people in crisis.

Context

Evidence from the evaluation of the Coordinated Community Support Programme

Most of the agencies involved in the CCS programme agree or strongly agree that accessing services is more likely to be a more **dignified experience** for people in local areas because of the improved coordination (56%).

In one of the CCS pilot sites **over 7,000 referrals were made via a digital referral system** in the most recent year

Most of the agencies involved in the CCS Programme agree or strongly agree (60%) that there are **better outcomes for people who use our services** because of the CCS Programme.

"Before the digital referral system, I had to keep on chasing [to find out if a referral had been picked up]. It was demanding. Now using the digital referral system saves me 10 to 15 hours a week. I can focus on my caseload now" (local authority stakeholder involved in coordinated support).

Most of the agencies involved in the CCS Programme agree/strongly agree that agencies are **working more closely** together because of the CCS Programme (66%).

"The digital referral system gives assurance. If you were just looking on the internet [for somewhere to refer], it's more of a minefield and the client themselves has to call them" (VCS Stakeholder involved in coordinated support).

DIGITAL

REFERRAL

SYSTEM