



University of Edinburgh

Evaluation

For

Investing in Children

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report is an evaluation of the work of Investing in Children over the period of Summer and Autumn 2006. It is compiled from conversations, interviews, focus groups and reports describing the work of Investing in Children. Specifically, it includes the responses of Staff, Partner Organisations and Children and Young People (of different ages from the: Sexual Health Group, Transport Group, Natural Allies, Sport England, Drugs Group, CAMHS, MALAP, Young Travellers, Listening to Children Strategy and Mega Phone Group). The evaluation was designed to consider whether IiC is an inclusive organisation, is effective at achieving change, transforms society's perception of children/young people, contributes to the agenda of its partners and contributes to the every child matters outcomes. The key conclusions are as follows

- **Inclusion.** Investing in Children has made efforts to monitor the types of children and young people who participate in its work. It has made significant inroads in the areas of working with Traveller and Disabled and looked-after children and young people, as well as children and young people experiencing social exclusion. It now has a system for monitoring participants. The practice models that have developed (agenda days, research, membership etc) are accessible to children and young people from different backgrounds, and with different skills and abilities. However, consideration could be given as to how IiC and the children and young people it works with can influence issues of inclusion in organisations that are not part of its membership scheme.
- **Effectiveness.** Investing in children includes a strongly committed team of staff who are keenly aware of the core values of the organisation. IiC enables many children and young people to achieve change in their life circumstances. It recognises the limitations of its approach that relates to barriers within society and is constantly striving to improve its practice and enable children and young people to overcome barriers to having their views heard and acted upon. The organisation has responded well to previous evaluations and demonstrated concrete examples of change and development (e.g. the development agency and the partnership board). The staff, children and young people within the organisation are keenly aware how the organisation might further develop. IiC could consider how best to create a strategy to further maximise the participatory nature of such development and to build on its considerable ability to listen to the views of staff, partners, children and young people. Some issues arose concerning staff training, mentoring and development. This will be a key area to consider as the organisation increases in size. Indeed, the organisation could consider how best to balance its informal friendly approach to staff relations with the quality control issue of a larger organisation and how best it can learn from other organisations that have taken such a journey.
- **Transformation.** The work of IiC contributes to an emancipatory discourse, through which the status of children and young people is transformed and they are able to claim their rights as citizens. A succession of children and young people from a range of projects sung the praises of the organisation. However, consideration needs to be given to how IiC enables children and young people to influence events in a sustained ways *in* the multiple sites they encounter on a daily basis. For example, children and young people may experience transformation in a primary school that is part of the

membership scheme but the secondary schools may not be members or children may experience discrimination in their home areas that is not addressed by the school. IiC needs to consider if and how it can enable children and young people to impact in a quick and effective way on the multiple sites of their lives. Many children and young people demonstrated a wish to further develop their work with IiC - consideration could be given as to how IiC can develop more work opportunities for children and young people and how it can commission children and young people to work on the key development issues of the organisations e.g. being more inclusive, engaging better with partners, breaking down the barriers between IiC and specific services, developing learning/development opportunities for staff. This would further develop the idea first proposed in the *Grit in the Oyster* evaluation (2000-2003) that a wider range of people can contribute to processes of decision making within the organisation.

- **Partnership.** IiC is in partnership with a variety of agencies. IiC in the main contributes to the agenda of its partners, however the consistency of contribution can vary. IiC could consider how to enable quick information exchange between itself and its partners and how to develop processes to ensure that collaboration with partner organisations remains at a high level as the organisation develops.
- **Every Child Matters Outcomes.** IiC contributes effectively to the Every Child Matters Outcomes. It contributes to the integrated services agenda for example, through its involvement in the CAMHS Strategy. It contributes to ‘being healthy and staying safe’ through a range of projects and membership schemes (including mental health, sexual health, drugs, sport). In general all projects run by IiC have benefits for children and young people’s well being because they develop and sustain respectful dialogue between children, young people and adults. IiC contributes to ‘enjoying and achieving’ by enabling children who experience social exclusion to gain a sense of their own ability through participation in various projects. All projects achieve the aim of enabling children and young people to make a ‘positive contribution’ and through paying young people to participate in projects IiC contributes to their ‘economic well being’. There is much scope for IiC to expand the economic well being agenda within Durham particularly in relation to developing projects that stimulate child led solutions to poverty. IiC contributes to the ‘respect and dignity’ agenda by consistently requiring its member organisations to set high participatory aspirations

Introduction:

This report summarises the key findings of an evaluation carried out by Dr John Davis Educational studies, University of Edinburgh. It sets out the key questions that were investigated, the people who participated and the findings concerning the views of children and young people, and staff.

Key Questions

The evaluation was designed to investigate a number of key areas raised by the previous Grit in The Oyster Evaluation. These included:

- Inclusion and Diversity: which children and young people interact with IiC
- Does IiC contribute to the transformation of the status of children and young people within society, from dependents to citizens.
- Does IiC meet its aims to enable stakeholders (members, partners, children and young people) to experience improvements in the circumstances of their everyday lives?
- Does IiC engage with partners, children's and young people's agenda's?
- Does IiC contribute to Every Child Matters Outcomes?
- Do they achieve their aims as a human rights organisation?
- How effective are their relationships with different organisations?
- Do they practice what they preach?
- What are the barriers they encounter to effective practice?
- How effective are they at overcoming these barriers
- How do they assess their own practice?
- Is their work children and young people initiated?
- How is IiC perceived by staff and the Development Agency group?

Key Groups Involved:

The research methods employed included conversations, interviews, focus groups (with key stakeholders) and analysis of reports describing the work of Investing in Children. Specifically, this report includes the responses of Staff, Partner Organisations and Children and Young People (of different ages from the: Sexual Health Group, Transport Group, Natural Allies, Sport England, Drugs Group, CAMHS, MALAP, Young Travellers, Listening to Children Strategy and Mega Phone Group).

Children and Young People's Views

Children/young people stated that they particularly valued participating in projects that involved mixed age groups. An information sheet and database has been developed to monitor those children and young people participating in IiC work. There was substantial evidence of IiC working on diversity issues particularly with disabled and traveller children/young people:

'I like it when the worker comes to our site we get to do posters about what we want to change and we have now got the porta cabin where we can play with play dough and the computer'

There was also evidence that this work enable children to recognise their own ability to contribute to processes of change in collaboration with the council:

'Were goin' to , first of all were goin' to raise some money ower selves like doin' sponsored walk, plays like Cindarella and things and then the money that we get for that were going to put into the council to see how much we need for a park on the site, like with miniture pigs and things.'

Through association with IiC, young people who communicate differently have been supported to participate in a variety of activities (e.g. being on the young people's panel for the appointment of the Director of Children's Services) There was also evidence that the IiC were supporting children and young people's learning regarding diversity issues, for example, the transport group were particularly disability aware and had developed an understanding of how transport issues affected a range of children and young people.

I think IiC are more aware of disability issues, not just because they have the two young lads that are blind working there but also because, we had a lad with bad hearing on our project and they sorted out a loop. We got jaws and supernova fitted into the computer and we have also got information and news letters in Braille. The Braille service weren't very good so they changed them very quickly.

One young man who had participated in a project was concerned that these approaches should also be applied to Old People's Homes, 'Why can people in Old People's Homes have more computers'. There were many cases where young people adapted their knowledge gained in one setting to be more considerate of people in another setting. There were also many good examples of projects enabling adults to listen to children and transforming local issues (e.g. drive project, travellers' project, MALAP, mental health group, local school catering etc)

Most children and young people felt that they initiated most aspects of the projects they worked in (with the exception of the Natural Allies project which did not originate in IiC). The Decisions group enabled young people's ideas to underpin IiC's work. However, there was a great deal of criticism of local government and health services capacity to respond to the issues of children and young people. One young person asked 'Why do they hate us so much? Some children and young people felt that service managers acted in a way that suggests that they felt threatened by new

ideas. The strongest criticism came of the nature of meetings particularly those that were not child friendly, where people in suits dominated discussions and dismissed the ideas of children and young people.

It can be a bit boring speaking to the council service people like. We used to go to them but it was all people in suits and nothing got done. So now we meet them here and it's much better. A person from the young people's group has like been the main person and taken charge – so we've got our agenda and we read that out then, then we'll see what can be done. Some times we will come to an agreement with them and other times we won't.

A number of young people were frustrated at the slow rate of change:

At one of the agenda days there was a young lad who kept getting their electricity switched off and we were like something should be done about that but am not sure anything could be done. Sometimes we want to change things that come up in projects but the person in the council whose job it is to change it isn't interested.

The raises the question: How can children and young people ensure that IiC messages and learning from projects has maximum impact and that learning from agenda days, the development agency, the partnership boards, the local strategic partnerships, and membership schemes can more quickly be brought together and impact on a range of policy areas. For example, some of the comments from children and young people raised the questions: what is their role in multi-agency working and how could it be made more strategic?

Other young people suggested that there had been some good examples of listening on behalf of specific council services but this varied across services.

Like we've been looking at the statistics for how many people have a max card and how many have got on the drive project and that's how we first heard that it wasn't working well and since then we have made sure that the right people are getting these opportunities. The people from the council they always come back and say to you if anything is changed and like that.

This suggests that any process developing wider impacts should be based on the assumption that drastic change is not necessarily required. A more considered approach that recognises the strengths and weakness of the organisation may be required. This raises the question, How effective is IiC at differentiating the rhetoric of participation from the reality? This is a question that occurred repeatedly during focus groups.

It is possible for an external evaluator to point to specific outcomes such as are outlined above but a more strategic approach raises the question how effective is IiC at following up issues that children and young people raise that can't be easily changed? An even bigger question relates to Hart's ladder of participation - how effective is IiC at enabling children and young people to set the agenda within the organisation on how to follow up these complex issues? There is a sense in this evaluation that though IiC in the main practices what it preaches on participation the

organisation still involves a hierarchical structure that has adults at the top and though children and young people are supported to come up with solutions to their own issues they may not be considered core to coming up with solutions to LiC's structural, management, evaluation and organisational problems.

Every Child Matters Outcomes.

LiC contributes effectively to the Every Child Matters Outcomes. It contributes to the integrated services agenda for example, through its involvement in the CAMHS Strategy and Multi-agency Looked After Partnership. It contributes to being healthy and staying safe through a range of projects and membership schemes including mental health, sexual health, drugs, sport and general benefits of all projects on children and young people's well being.

Investing in Children is like the districts' participation strategy, they signed up to it with the other services... ..we will do anything in our power to support children and young people to be active citizens in their own right... ..When we did the Peterlee Club Idle it worked because young people were involved every step of the way and when the adults raised the problem of a charge to get in the solution was suggested by the young people. They wanted it run by adults but the young people weren't for that and the organised it themselves, designed the posters, proper security like for a club at every stage it worked and they had a hundred young people coming regularly.

LiC contributes to enjoying and achieving by enabling children who experience social exclusion to gain a sense of their own ability through participation in projects. All projects achieve the aim of enabling children and young people to making a positive contribution and through paying young people to participate in projects LiC contributes to their economic well being. There is much scope to develop this area, particularly in relation to child led solutions to poverty. LiC contributes to the Respect and Dignity agenda by consistently requiring its member organisations to set high participatory aspirations. However, there was a great deal of tension between the locations where LiC is being effective and the locations that children and young people inhabit when they are not working with LiC e.g. home/parents, neighbourhood, school, clubs etc. There was great praise from one local councillor concerning LiC's involvement in local, activities that support young people's sense of self-respect. However, it was also pointed out that this good work may not be sustainable if resources cannot be found to provide local facilities and opportunities for children and young people.

Staff Views and Organisational Issues

IiC involves a strong committed team; there is some evidence of a spreading of responsibility since the Grit in the Oyster evaluation and of the development of a flexible working environment underpinned by notions of trust and reflective working. In the main Staff are able to put forward their own solution to issues that arise and to receive support when needed. The organisation practices what it preaches in relation to welcoming children and young people and creating a space for young people to feel safe and comfortable to work within the building. Indeed, one young person commented: 'it feels like home here'. Administrative and project worker staff have similar values and hold the same ethos of children's rights - this is particularly important as children and young people engage with both types of worker. The processes of working within the office are underpinned by very good interaction between children, young people and all staff within the office

Children and young people commented that they felt treated the same as adults by IiC, would recommend the organisation to a friend, particularly like getting paid and valued the opportunity to access snacks/drinks when they were attending meetings and working on projects.

A number of staff raised concerns about technical issues that impacted on their work and their ability to include diverse groups of children and young people. These issues ranged from problems with computing equipment, to difficulties concerning the location and accessibility of the office. There were some tension between internal local government agency policies/services and IiC aspirations (e.g. payment for apprenticeship scheme, training for apprentices, use of intranet, quality of Braille service and availability of new computer programs):

In some services we are welcomed it depends. For example, it depends on the environment, I got told off by the council for misusing the intranet because I had put the pledges stuff on the intranet and asked council workers to sign up to the children and young people's issues. I asked the council people to sign it and send it back to us and I was told off for messing with people's minds.

There were some issues raised concerning the need for more admin staff particularly to deal with newsletter production. A number of staff raised issues concerning the utility of council equal opportunity training, suggesting a need for a more strategic approach to this type of staff development.

Some issues were also raised over equity of training opportunities and career structures. This raised the question, is there equality of development opportunities for staff? How is this demonstrated? Similarly questions were raised regarding recruitment of and evaluation of consultants and young people:

The key questions for the organization should be, how are young people and staff recruited to work for IiC? What is the strategy for offering them continuing professional development and how do we evaluate who are the good and bad consultants and who we are going to use again. If a young person/consultant is unhappy with their treatment at IiC is there a process for resolving this? Do young people/consultants know about this process?

Some issues were raised concerning the suitability of present induction into job roles and whether new staff should undergo the same training as member organisation staff.

A key issue arose in relation to the development agency. This was: how to broaden the organisation without losing informal welcoming environment? At present information is shared between staff on a daily basis in passing and in team meetings. Team meetings tend to focus on key decisions. If the organisation expands – how will this approach be maintained?

In the past we worked differently you know we used to have practice meetings and everything was put on the table and discussed about who fancied doing that work and who was interested in that area. So you could almost bid for it, but because of the situation we find our selves in things have taken a bit of a back step and I am not sure if everyone knows what's coming through now.

Many staff felt supported in their work role and enjoyed the opportunity to work autonomously:

A couple of weeks ago I felt drowned in my work load an I did go to my line manager and I felt I got a good response and it worked well, there is a bit of a freedom to work in your own style as individuals in the organisation but also I am getting the support where I need it, I have joined liC because its something I believe in and I am developing my skills and I think there are more opportunities to do things.

However, not all staff felt able to make decisions easily:

I have been involved in projects, what ever when I have really had to reflect on what my role is here and I have had to go to the managers and actually say am I getting this right or just talk it though and that's one of the good things about working here I feel comfortable to do that with out hem thinking I don't know what am talking about or that I am failing. I was in a meeting with the local partnership and some of the workers there felt there should be uniformity around including young people from ethnic minorities or disabilities and while I was sitting listening I was thinking yeh we should but I was uncomfortable to put my idea across in case it wasn't a priority for investing in children and when I cam back it was ok because we are trying to develop a universal approach to inclusion, the thing was that we don't tend to separate out groups of children so there might have been a problem if they were going to create a select group. Cause I am relatively new to post I do have to keep checking.

Staff are a key resource yet they are not all the same. Differences in staff knowledge and experience may require a variety of professional development opportunities to be offered within liC. This raises the question how can a small organisations offer a range of development opportunities for staff that are of high enough quality. There was some suggestion that there may be opportunities to collaborate with other organisations to access improved staff training (e.g. through trade off of membership scheme for bespoke training).

Projects and Membership Organisations

There was evidence of strong support from primary schools and good working relationships with a range of membership organisations. LiC was seen as key both to supporting children's sense of self in schools and to demonstrating the schools ethos during OFSTED inspections. Some issues arose concerning the amount of membership from secondary schools.

There was evidence of good local collaboration with community groups, police and youth initiatives. However, this work was very reliant on specific staff in a service. This raises the question is there scope to increase LiC's induction training activities for new local professionals in a wider range of service areas? What is LiC's strategy for dealing with staff turnover in membership organisations and maintaining support through processes of staff change?

Some respondents criticised the speed of feedback and consistency of worker liaison e.g. where membership was not re-awarded one organisation felt the dialogue had stopped and they were not given sufficient information on the key issues they needed to address to get their membership back. It was also suggested that there could be more visits and more contact with children and young people during visits (although it was understood that this would have cost implications). Some issues arose in organisations where a manager signs up to the membership scheme but not all the staff in the organisation value participation.

I was working in a location and some issues arose from children and young people - the senior manager was all for deciding what the solutions were and forcing the staff to change. So it was kind of hold on a minute - we need to talk to the young people first about the solution and then the staff so we don't alienate anyone in the process. Some times the local managers are signed up to the process and that can be a problem. Then I am coming back here and looking for advice on how to work with that.

Some concerns were raised that the membership scheme could be watered down due to lack of staff to fully implement it (particularly if the organisation expands rapidly). Issues were also raised concerning the cost of the scheme and whether the cost included full administrative costs.

One participant in the membership scheme wondered if learning from LiC projects could be shared more effectively with organisations in the membership scheme to enable a coherent approach to participation. This raised the questions: How quickly is information from projects and agenda days worked into LiC planning and the development agency? (E.g. one project found that young people had a very negative view of work experience. Can LiC in partnership with young people develop its own in house approach and market this with its membership?) There was some suggestion that more effort could be made to exchange information between membership projects and that this could be facilitated through the internet and other mediums (a staff member is now employed with this remit). Similarly staff saw the benefits of having up to date case studies of recent projects to use with members to highlight expectations around participation. This is a ripe area for further development and consideration should be given to how children and young people could be central to this information exchange process?

There are day conferences and events that IiC run but it would also be good to get more information about good practice on top of what comes out in the news letter or to be able to know what's going on in some of the projects. That might help us avoid reinventing the wheel and by providing different examples and showing how different practices work. It would help get more people on board within organisations.

Similarly, it was felt there was a need to provide more information to children and young people:

A lot of the children and young people on different projects don't know what the other projects are doing and some of the issues connect - we need to question how we do that. It's becoming similar for the workers, depending on how busy you are you might not have a clue what the others are doing.

A number of respondents raised issues concerning IiC's relationship with other agencies within the local authority and health services, and the adultist nature of specific council services?

I realise now how difficult it can be when you are trying to effect change. For example, the council meetings they were so stiff. Its so funny now because they are doing something about the speed limits now - its taken a long time but they are taking all the credit for it and don't mention the young people. Its like they can't acknowledge us

I went into a school and met a SENCO and they said they were professionals and they would not appreciate Jo public coming in and telling us what the children want. They could not see the benefits of IiC membership – yet other schools are using us in their inspections.

I have done some work in education and youth and community and I have found some of the workers quite hostile to me coming in and that is a problem. There is definitely conflict with different organisations and that's to be expected because we all have our own ways of working, say youth services and youth club are now inspected by ofsted and they want to provide what young people are asking for but that's in conflict with what the government is asking us to provide young people. Like young people might just want to kick a ball around for an hour but the managerialist approach of the government is saying - what are they getting out of that.

This raised the question of why does IiC get praised by one organisation but not another and what do they want to do about that? Do they only want to work with organisations that are already partially interested in children's rights? One worker pointed out that there may be a false dichotomy when saying that IiC's aims are contrary to the marketing approaches of local authority service performance indicators e.g. the Drive project (where young people are enabled to access

driving lessons) is a good example of IiC making sure that money is spent locally in a more effective way and achieving better outcomes for the local service and good outcomes for young people.

This raises the question; can IiC develop this further to have a part of the organisation that markets itself to specifically improve the effectiveness of money spent on children and young people? Could this offer career and work opportunities for young people to learn how to facilitate and manage these projects? Could this be linked to Knowledge Transfer partnerships that aim to enable local organisations to become more cost effective?

There is a need to broaden out the evaluation to further work with a wider range of organisations and children and young people could be put at the centre of this process.

Next Steps

- Is the evaluation telling you information you don't already know or do we need to reconsider the approach?
- Focus group with Partnership Board?
- Broadening out to those organisations, children and young people who have lost contact with liC
- Broadening out to children's rights/participation organisations at a regional/national level
- Further analysis of project and membership reports to pull out key issues and consider how they relate to the Development Agency
- Consideration of different development models (need expert advice on what other organisations have taken this type of journey, what were the lessons learned and what does this mean for the development agency)
- Sustainability – hard won gains are sometimes quickly lost when stakeholders change. Issues were raised concerning how to ensure that agreements are sustained over time.
- It was suggested there was a need to move on from Transport Group success and to provide more evidence of good practice in a range of ways to a range of audiences
- More strategic approach to integrated working, public relations, publications strategy and information sharing?
- Dissemination of evaluation