

Working with the Third Sector

Third sector and voluntary services in rural communities

In rural areas, there is a greater reliance on a broad range of volunteer and third sector services. These range from simple community befriending and shared travel schemes, to locally delivered easily accessible mental health services and community operated ambulance services.

Sometimes the third sector provides an essential service that statutory services would simply not be able to deliver efficiently. An example is the development and use of [voluntary first responders](#) to provide interim medical services where the travel times for ambulances are typically longer than average, due to distance, terrain and sometimes weather.

Another example is the [MIND network](#) of mental health support services. This network of support, often situated in rural and urban town centres, provides walk-in services for people with low level mental health needs. In turn, MIND, are supported by the Samaritans, another well-known voluntary service, who provide a 24hr helpline which is easily accessible for people in both rural and urban settings.

In the current climate of heightened cost-awareness, where statutory services are often being withdrawn or reduced, such third sector services are increasingly vital, especially in rural areas.

Issues and concerns

Shared awareness is essential for public and third sector services to be able to deliver effectively. Referral by clinical and care professionals can be hampered through lack of visibility of the third sector support available.

- Third sector bodies tend not to have significant promotional budgets and rely very much on word of mouth, the leveraging of goodwill and use of informal networks.
- Third sector services tend to be set up as 'projects', predominantly with a 2-3 year period of funding. Health and social care practitioners do not invest time understanding what is available, because in their experience, they have just get to the point of referring when the (time limited) project finishes.
- Third sector projects are usually very client based, with limited resource available for the infrastructure and networking needed to get partners on board.

How could digital technologies improve services?

We propose a simple web-based portal to provide access into the current main sources of support already available in Cumbria, providing integrated access to multiple information sources. This will enable statutory bodies to find relevant, up-to-date information about third sector services, and will provide a process for voluntary and third sector organisations to easily and cost-effectively maintain their own information and promote it to the right people.

The beneficiaries of making the third sector more visible and easily accessible would include Primary Care, Community Services, Mental Health Services, Local Authorities and Adult Social Care, Police and Probation Services, Acute Discharge Services and of course the service-users, carers and their families themselves.

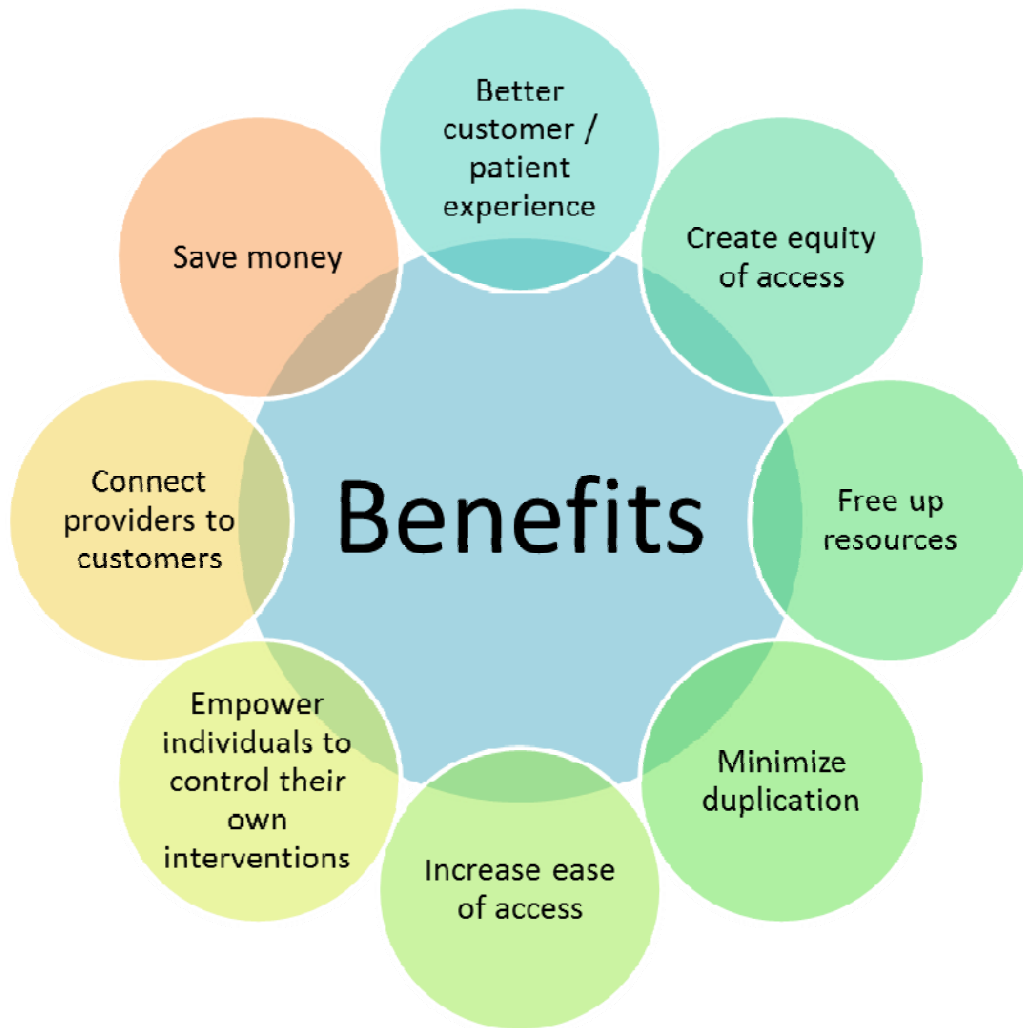


Figure 1: a pictorial representation of the benefits to different stakeholder groups

Benefits of improved working between third and statutory sectors

- People will start to get consistent access to the support solutions that are available to them.
- Immediate and appropriate support will prevent issues escalating and using scarce resource
- Capacity in all services will not be tied up unnecessarily.

