Open Doors Programme
Theory of Change
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Theory of Change of the Open Doors programme

Family Action

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This document presents the Theory of Change (TOC) for the Open Doors Programme. It describes the way in which access to cash grants provided as part of a package of support creates change in the lives of severely disadvantaged individuals and families.

nef consulting has been commissioned by Family Action to undertake an outcomes evaluation of the Open Doors programme. This evaluation will seek to understand and articulate the impact that the grants have had on those supported within the wider support systems of the partner organisations. The next phase of this research will involve measuring the extent to which change has taken place, as well as understanding what would have happened in the absence of the cash grants and impact for wider stakeholders, such as the State. Family Action will collect data through their management information systems, with additional primary research undertaken by nef consulting, to evidence the longer term changes. The data will be analysed by nef consulting, and will inform interim research updates and a final evaluation report, due in March 2016.

The provision of cash grants began in late 2013 so it is hoped this document will be used by Family Action and referral partners as a way of describing how they anticipate the programme will create change, building on partners’ experience and existing research.

1.2 The need for this research

The evidence base for the impact that cash grants can have on the lives of individuals is relatively underdeveloped. In 2010, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) conducted qualitative research into customer experiences and perspectives of the emergency social fund. This research focused primarily on the process of accessing cash support, and did not look at the effectiveness of those grants in supporting DWP clients to achieve sustained change.

The UK Government undertook two consultations into a new approach to the Social Fund; in 2008 a consultation presented a new approach to delivering support, with increased use of external

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The Open Doors programme is a small grants programme with support specifically targeting individuals and families experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.

In both consultations, there was a focus on understanding how the process could be made more effective, the implicit assumption being that if the processes changed, the funds could be used more effectively.

The Open Doors programme moves beyond the research available to date and seeks to test exactly how accessing cash can create change, and to provide evidence of the magnitude of the change for different recipient groups. By understanding the impact of the grants, the programme and research will help inform future decision-making on grants both within Family Action, and across other grant making organisations (for example, local authorities). The evidence base will also help Family Action to articulate the wider implications of policy changes; understanding how changes to welfare support impact upon individuals and families, and the support structures that can mitigate the negative impacts of these policy changes. This evidence base will be shared with policy makers, through policy reports and events.

The principle objectives of this research are therefore:

1. To ensure Open Door programme grants are well-targeted in line with a deep understanding of what matters to recipients (captured in the theory of change).
2. To understand and demonstrate the way in which Open Doors programme grants contribute to positive, sustainable results for individuals and families, as part of a wider package of support.
3. To develop a measurement framework that captures change over time and provides systematic evidence of the outcomes achieved by the project to inform a final evaluation.

1.3 Methodology

A theory of change describes the process through which change occurs, drawing on those involved in an intervention to be actively involved in ‘telling the story’ of how the intervention affects them. It enables a deep understanding of what matters to stakeholders and how change takes place. This is important because quite often services are measured using outputs, such as the number

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of recipients of a service. However, outputs alone only tell us that an activity has taken place, not what has happened as a consequence of that activity. To capture impact we have to go further, focusing on the changes (outcomes) that occur in the lives of recipients as a result of support. We call the relationship between investment, activities, outputs, and outcomes the theory of change. In other words, it is the story of how the Open Doors programme creates change and makes a difference. This theory of change therefore provides a framework to measure and value what matters to beneficiaries of the Open Doors programme – and thus to understand the true impact of the programme.

**nef consulting** have developed a framework for understanding the change journey, as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: nef consulting theory of change framework**

![Diagram of the nef consulting theory of change framework](image-url)
The framework isolates the need and aim of the Open Doors programme for a range of stakeholders and subsequently maps the change journey in the short, medium and long term. It allows identification of the activities that contribute to change (green arrows) and the manner in which they are delivered, as key factors to change occurring. It also takes into consideration the external factors that may affect change, both in terms of aspects that enable but also prevent change from taking place. Finally, the line of accountability identifies the extent to which activities can influence change; once beyond this line, the outcomes are influenced by the participant and external forces. This line of accountability therefore influences when measurement takes place.

This framework was used as a guide during engagement with stakeholders to understand how the Open Doors programme creates change for recipients of the grants.

The theory of change has been informed by the following activities:

- A desk review of the available literature on cash grants, including Equality impact assessment of changes to the Social Fund Crisis Loans scheme¹ (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2011); The Social Fund at a local level² (CPAG, 2012); Public Perceptions of Poverty and Social Exclusion: Final Report on Focus Group Findings³ (PSE UK, 2012); Shelter’s response to DWP Social Fund call for evidence⁴ (Shelter, 2010); Social Fund Community Care Grants, DWP Customer Insight, Research Report 2⁵ (DWP, 2011); Implementing Universal Credit⁶ (centre for economic and social Inclusion, 2012).
- Primary stakeholder engagement with programme staff and partners in a focus group of 18 participants across 11 referral organisations. This was held at Family Action’s offices in London in June 2013;
- Telephone interviews with six front-line staff from partner organisations, and one recipient of cash grants.
- Review of the initial outcomes and process with key representatives from Family Action, and the Open Doors Steering Group.

All engagement was focused primarily on outcomes for the participants. However, engagement with staff also uncovered outcomes for the organisations themselves. The semi-structured interview schedule is presented in Appendix 1.

A current limitation of the existing stakeholder engagement is the lack of engagement with direct recipients of the grants. Although a number of recipients were attempted to be contacted we were only
able to speak to one recipient. We recognise the importance of speaking to recipients directly and plan to engage individuals through case studies as part of the next phase to test the theory of change.

It is also important to note that the cash grants element of the Open Doors programme started only this year, and that time is required for change to take place for recipients. It is for this reason, therefore, that the theory of change presents anticipated outcomes based on the knowledge, experience and expertise of the partner organisations. The theory will be fully tested for its relevance and effectiveness in the second phase of this research.
2. The need for the programme

The Open Doors programme is operating in a challenging climate for low income and vulnerable individuals and families, and the organisations that support them. The personal challenges faced by individuals and their families, coupled with significant changes to the welfare and other support systems, have created a gap in the availability of a safety net for those in crisis.

The context of these challenges is outlined in this section, which frames our understanding of why the Open Doors programme is needed.

National policy

The programme has been developed in response to the localisation of the discretionary part of the Social Fund, part of the UK welfare support offer. In April 2013 the Fund was devolved to 152 local authorities, removing the responsibility of central Government to administer, via Job Centre Plus, discretionary schemes including Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants.

According to the Children’s Society, the £178m allocated for 2013/14 across Britain for spending on the localised components of the discretionary Social Fund represents a real-term cut of £151m (46%) since 2010, on equivalent expenditure through Community Care Grants and the relevant components of the national loans budget.³

Research also sites, following the move to give local authorities greater discretion, many have stopped providing grants or loans.⁴ Overall, 81% of local authorities were said to be providing direct or ‘in-kind’ support with the provision of goods rather than cash assistance, while 62% of schemes did not provide loans.⁵

In January 2014 it was reported that the Department for Work and Pensions planned to scrap its cash allocation to local authority welfare assistance schemes from April 2015 and that subsequent local welfare would be funded from local authority general funds.⁶

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If this happens there is an additional risk that local authorities may choose to significantly reduce or even close their support schemes entirely. Therefore, without cash payments being offered more widely the most vulnerable families could be missing out on the emergency support they need.

For those families in precarious economic and social situations, these changes to welfare support leave them more vulnerable to falling into an emergency financial situation, as demand continues to increase and supply is increasingly restricted. Two changes to the policy environment have led to this vulnerability:

- Overall funding has been reduced, as research undertaken by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in 2012 reports. Across a sample of 12 local authorities, the available funding for devolved local expenditure was over 13% less than local DWP levels in 2011/12 (CPAG, 2012). In addition £53bn is being cut from social security spending between 2011/12 and 2014/15, reducing the funding available to support those in need of financial support.

- Eligibility and receipt of welfare benefits has become more complex. The implementation of Universal Credit (a replacement for the current system of means-tested benefits and tax credits) will be rolled out at the end of 2013. The new system will include online application and management, monthly payments and a single payment at the household level. Inclusion research (Implementing Universal Credit, Inclusion, 2012) found that there are concerns amongst stakeholders that the IT infrastructure will be ready in time, and little guidance on what will happen if things go wrong. They also found that there is anxiety amongst claimants regarding the gap between payments, especially in transitional stages of moving from one funding arrangement to another. The added complexity of the many changes to support schemes (including the Social Fund) will require DWP and other support staff to gain an understanding of how national and local schemes interact, and how this affects the complexity of the support.

In addition to these two factors, there is also the chance that local authorities may not set up new local funding schemes, due to their other statutory requirements. The discharge of Social Fund and other duties to local authorities is being done at a time when many are reducing their Supporting People budgets. For local authorities, reduced budgets can mean a significant reduction in their non-statutory services, with funding reserved for those in most need. Local authorities will need resources to set up/ merge and administer the
scheme, some of which will be provided by DWP. For those with reduced support systems, the available funding may not be enough to set up a new local system, which may deter them from doing so, or they may use some of the funding pot to be able to support this, reducing the amount available for those in need.

**Supporting those with severe and multiple disadvantage**

Those served by the Open Doors programme are individuals and their families who are experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages. These individuals have interlocking needs, and can be poorly supported by individual services and public policy, which may focus on the single presenting needs to which their service can respond.

Research has found that the public has a wide ranging opinion on what is considered ‘reasonable’ or ‘adequate’ living conditions. This reflects social judgements relating to norms of self-presentation, the avoidance of shame, and the value of social connections and norms.⁹ (PSE UK, 2012). Participants in the research, however, emphasise the ‘interconnections between living standards and personal autonomy, well-being and quality of life’. It was understood that social exclusion prevents people from being able to fully participate in socially accepted activities and lifestyles.

For individuals and families in these situations, it can be extremely difficult to budget for an emergency or unexpected expense. This can be due to their financial situation (e.g. low income/ benefits, or lack of access to finance) and also their ability to plan for events. Many of the organisations who form part of the referral partnership support individuals who have no recourse to public funds. For these individuals, there can be - in some cases - literally no access to cash at a time of crisis.

The services that exist to support those in severe and multiple disadvantages recognise the individual and structural barriers that people face in terms of moving from a life of dependence to independence. People need personal resources and social support to be able to change their life course, and the speed at which this happens will depend on their starting point, the nature of their needs and the structural challenges they face.
Family Action has been providing support services and grants to disadvantaged families since 1869. It supports 45,000 families and children a year in England through a variety of programmes. These programmes include direct support to parents with particular needs (e.g. mental health needs), schools based support for children, support for carers and support for vulnerable adults.

Family Action hypothesised that government welfare policy changes, implemented since 2012, would negatively impact the lives of those with severe and multiple disadvantage. Changes to welfare support such as caps on housing benefit, the “bedroom tax” and increasing conditionality on welfare to work payments have increased the emotional and financial pressure on those in precarious situations. Feedback from Family Action frontline staff has found that clients are encountering more financial barriers, and that their ability to access direct financial support has been reduced; there are reduced amounts of direct grants available and increased demand. In addition, Family Action wishes to revise its approach to its grants programme to ensure it is better targeted to this group.

In 2013, Family Action established the Open Door Grants Programme specifically targeting individuals and families facing severe and multiple disadvantage. Family Action will work with selected partner organisations to disburse approximately 460 grants per year over three years to help alleviate poverty. The average value is £250 per grant.

3. What is the Open Doors Programme?

What gets funded by small cash grants?

Grants are available for essential personal and household needs such as clothing, beds and cookers. Almost any need will be considered (with the exception of the exclusions below) if the application demonstrates that a positive difference will be made to the life of the applicant as a result of receiving a small grant.

Grants are not available for: education or training needs; business start-up or other costs; recreational needs; council tax arrears; debts (except utility bills); fines; funeral expenses (including associated expenses, such as headstones); gifts (such as toys for birthdays, Christmas or other festivals); rent arrears; rent deposits; rent payments; repayment of loans; bankruptcy; items already purchased; holidays; and daily living expenses (except where the applicant’s benefit have been stopped due to sanctions or they are going through the appeals process).

The programme will work with referral partner organisations to offer cash support to those most in need, i.e. those defined as being in severe and multiple disadvantage through an application process. The cash will be offered to those accessing Family Action and partner organisation services such as support with mental health issues, substance misuse or homelessness. Recipients will be supported with their ‘primary’ need by the relevant specialist or project. They will be supported, in most cases, for between 6 weeks and one year.
Partner organisations will aim to achieve sustained hard outcomes for participants that will differ depending on their support; these will be defined for each person at the application stage. For example, someone with mental health problems may aim to improve their daily routine. In addition, specialist support helps participants to achieve other behavioural outcomes, which should impact on their well-being. Some programmes will feed into support groups, which will continue to support the recipient/family once the main activities are completed.

The programme has been funded by LankellyChase Foundation. LankellyChase aims to bring about change that transforms the quality of life of people who face severe and multiple disadvantage. The Open Doors programme, and this accompanying research, will help to develop the understanding of how those with severe and multiple disadvantage can be supported, and the extent to which access to tangible resources as part of intensive support can empower individuals to regain control over their own lives and circumstances.
This section presents our understanding of initial, medium and longer-term changes for recipients as they receive the cash grants and specialised support. Figure 2 presents our understanding of the journey that Open Doors programme recipients take as they move through a programme of support – it a graphical representation of the theory of change. Through the varied and complex stories from staff we identified recurring themes and patterns that typified recipient journeys.

Figure 2: Theory of Change for Open Doors participants

The themes and patterns depicted in Figure 2 are presented in in terms of positive and negative outcomes, and where a theme is directly referred to the text is highlight in bold. Participants identified
during interviews with staff are used to illustrate how cash grants have been used by organisations in the past. These are presented in blue in the left panel.

4.1 Short term outcomes

We first consider the initial changes that individuals or families experience when they are first offered a cash grant as a part of support package. We want to be able to understand their initial reactions and any immediate changes.

Positive outcomes

Accessing cash grants helps recipients to tackle immediate issues that affect their sense of safety and security, both physical and emotional. A common example cited was supporting a recipient to move house because alongside providing physical relief, moving to safe space also ensures that the recipient can continue to engage with the support being provided.

In addition, cash grants can help to reduce chronic psychosocial stress. This often results from being in a difficult situation which cannot be resolved by the individual alone. This stress has an immediate effect on the recipient’s well-being, and may have further impact family members.

Each of the specialist support services puts the recipient’s voice at the heart of their support, ensuring that the person feels listened to and consequently, feels valued. Cash grants support this outcome by helping the recipient to access the things they need; therefore reinforcing the other support they are accessing to help them move towards independence.

Accessing cash grants as part of a package of support helps to build the confidence of recipients because they can be used to help recipients achieve something or prevent a further crisis. Accessing these grants as part of a package of support means that the recipient has been supported to identify their needs and desires, and prioritise those which require the immediate action. Taking an active role further reinforces a sense of control over their lives and provides hope that things can change.

One client did not have access to a functioning washing machine and had trouble with maintaining her personal hygiene. She was able to access a cash grant for a washing machine, which helped to improve the cleanliness of the individual, her sense of dignity and reduced the stress she felt from her situation.

7 Psychosocial stress is the result of a cognitive appraisal of what is at stake and what can be done about it. More simply put, psychosocial stress results when we look at a perceived threat in our lives (real or even imagined), and discern that it may require resources we don’t have.
One client had severe issues with her teeth and needed to access dental support. She had a practical problem with this: no access to childcare. They were able to access a grant from social services to pay for the childcare which enabled her to be able to access the treatment. This was described as a ‘turning point’ by the organisation as it helped her to engage more in the service.

Staff reported that being able to support someone to access additional cash to help with their needs helps to build the relationship between the recipient and the support worker. Staff found that it is a positive way to engage with hard to reach families and individuals. Taking the time to support recipients to access something tangible – and immediate - demonstrates an investment from the organisation, and can build positive relationships that help to deliver more effective support.

**Negative outcomes**

There are also some immediate negative outcomes as a result of being supported. Initially, recipients may experience mistrust or disbelief that someone is offering cash without any formal requirement on their part, other than to spend the money as agreed. This outcome is likely to be negated by the other emotions that they experience, especially once the money has been spent. Staff also felt that some recipients may feel a sense of pressure as a result of being given something tangible; they do not want to take on the responsibility of the money.

The criteria for the funding may also cause friction for those who have not received support, as they may feel that they have not been as well supported. Accessing cash grants in addition to support may also create additional dependency: the support is intended to help people to become independent, but knowing where an additional source of money is could create a crutch for vulnerable individuals if not managed properly.

4.2 **Medium-term outcomes**

As recipients continue with their support programme, we try to understand the changes that they experience. The medium-term outcomes are broadly shared across the partner agencies and are, in some cases, directly linked to the goods or services purchased by the cash grant.

**Positive outcomes**

The support offered by the organisations helps individuals to meaningfully engage in the support provided. By building on the trust and confidence recipients experience at the start of the programme, the grant can help to lay the foundations for future support work. The removal of immediate threats and stress can help recipients to settle down into a routine.

As a result of accessing cash, the recipient may be in a position which allows them to better deal with challenges in their lives. In the medium-term it was reported that this should help them to be more able to meet their own physical needs.
Accessing the support and gaining tangible help enables recipients to **improve their self-esteem**. In the cases where support and cash have helped recipients to achieve a tangible positive outcome they are able to report “I’m functioning”, which is about experiencing the ‘normality’ that others do.

The experience of something working out well can offer recipients **positive memories**, a validation to refer back to of a time when they were able to move forward. In some cases, this may result in an experience which is a marker in someone’s life, something which distinguishes the transition between two periods. The recipient will be able to use these as examples of a time when they showed competence, and were able to take steps forward.

The cash grants can offer recipients the chance to **take ownership and control**. This can be in terms of ‘things’ and also their situation. Staff felt that going through the process of identifying what they needed, making a decision to pursue them and then experiencing ‘owning’ something helped recipients to take control. It was reported that whilst recipients would not necessarily value something they had never had, the validation that comes from reflecting on a situation, making a decision and moving on, helped them to fully value what they had achieved.

Having access to cash, the positive experience of dealing with something in their lives, and being supported by an organisation that develops a personalised action plan helps recipients to be more optimistic about their future; they have the **space to see something different for themselves** (and family).

**Negative outcomes**

It was acknowledged, however, that the medium term is a fragile time, and recipients may experience a dip and **feel daunted** after the initial support has helped them to somewhere more secure, either due to chaos or due to a realisation of the journey ahead.

**4.3 Longer-term outcomes**

The support programmes and the grants aim to help recipients to create positive, sustainable change in their lives. We assume that the Open Doors programme (and partner organisation activities) are mostly able to influence the short and medium term outcomes, leading to the longer term outcomes presented in this section. However, these outcomes are likely to occur upon completion of the support.

Ultimately, the programmes of support offer recipients the right to feel that their life can be transformed. It is about their aspirations, their
view of what is better for them and their family. Whilst this will differ from person to person, staff identified common themes in terms of longer-term outcomes.

The packages of support are about creating safety and stability for individuals and families. This stability should enable them to live safe and fulfilling lives, and where necessary, provide further positive outcomes for their children.

The support helps recipients to move towards greater independence in the sense of developing independent living skills. It can also help recipients to understand where their personal responsibilities lie, and when they might need to seek additional support. In addition, this should decrease the isolation that individuals and families face when they are faced with challenging situations, as they would have been supported to identify and maintain positive social relationships.

Independence from systems and institutions is a key aim of the partner organisations which refer to the Open Doors programme: the support is intense and works with the individual or family, but a delicate balance needs to be struck in order to ensure that they do not become dependent on the support programme, organisation or access to emergency cash. Key to this is helping recipients to build safe networks, relationships and links to communities. This, alongside building self-worth and giving them positive experiences, helps them to develop resilience against future shocks; it’s about supporting them to build their personal capacity. An example of this is support with budgeting; developing the ability to understand and manage a household budget will help to reduce the chances of future financial crises. Bringing together a sense of the future, some stability and positive experience helps recipients to trust their own decisions.

Improved health and well-being is both a direct and indirect outcome of supporting individuals and families with specific needs. Staff reported that recipients were more confident in both understanding and asking for what they needed and wanted, helping to improve their sense of meaning and purpose and competence, which are key elements of personal well-being. Moving into a safe place also contributes to grant recipients maintaining or improving their health.

4.4 Enablers and preventers

The enablers identified by the staff can be classified into two groups: well-being enablers and practical enablers. The well-being enablers mirror the outcomes in the theory of change, as they are about individuals and families gaining a sense of value, trusting the partner organisations, developing self-esteem and resilience, and having a sense of empowerment. The practical enablers are about gaining
knowledge about where to get support, having access to education, employment, housing and learning practical skills such as budgeting and cooking.

Partner organisations identified a range of preventers to the outcomes being achieved and/or maintained. Regarding recipients themselves these ranged from a lack of skills (such as literacy and IT) or on-going mental health issues to lack of commitment through fear or mistrust. Pressure from friends, family or a peer group who are dysfunctional was also highlighted. Systemic preventers include increasingly stringent funding criteria and an unequal access to support across the country. The underlying preventer is a lack of continuity of support which will disrupt any stability facilitated by the cash grant and support provided.

4.5 Individuals and families: critical factors for change

The factors that enable change to occur is as important as naming the change itself. Through engagement with the staff and stakeholders the following key factors for change were identified:

- **Focus on the person and their needs**: the humanistic manner in which support is delivered to recipients provides the building blocks for trust, hope and optimism of a better future. This allows recipients to feel valued, important and have a sense of meaning and purpose. The cash grant further facilitates these outcomes because it removes obstacles or creates opportunities that allow recipients to engage meaningfully and sustainably with the support provided.

- **Receiving something without conditions**: the act of being given the grant creates a sense of responsibility, provides a sense of control and ultimately, empowers recipients to take positive steps to improve their lives. This can be a turning point but also an unfamiliar experience, which may create initial negative outcomes for the recipient.

- **Time and space**: the opportunity to remove an immediate problem from the lives of recipients creates the time and space to deal with the underlying causes of that issue (for example tackling immediate debt and then working on their financial management). This is a crucial step in helping recipients to move from addressing their physical needs only to being able to consider some of their wants and aspirations i.e. progressing in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.11
4.6 Outcomes for the partner organisations and the State

As a result of the outcomes for individuals and families, there are also outcomes created for the partner organisations and the State. These are implicit and will occur if success is created for individuals and families.

**Outcomes for partner organisations**

As stated, the ability to access a cash grant can help to improve the relationship between a recipient and their support worker. This, in turn, can help the organisation to be more effective in providing support to the recipient. In addition, the expediting of the development of a relationship can help to reduce the resources required by the organisation to support the individual or family; the sooner the trust is developed, and an understanding of needs, the sooner support can commence.

**Outcomes for the State**

The outcomes for the State are more challenging to identify due to the lack of evidence on the impact of cash grants.

We assume, therefore, that if recipients are supported into a safer and secure place, with greater personal resources to cope with challenges, it is possible that they will have fewer requirements for the State to support crises. This can be both in terms of financial support, and personal support. The outcomes to be explored for the State are:

- Reduced likelihood recipients seek financial support.
- Reduced demand on health and social care services.

4.7 The role of cash grants

The short to long term outcomes are understood for the support programmes and cash grants **together**. The specific role that accessing cash grants plays appears to enable to the outcomes in the theory of change. The following stories were shared by staff to illustrate the role that the grants play:

“[Accessing cash grants is a] bit different [to other support], it’s more tangible. Although, lots of other things are needed; you can get to barriers such as [they] need money to move and haven’t got it. [One person had] no access to savings, despite always working, she never had access to joint account”.
Having access to cash…“Matters quite a lot, especially around benefit changes. Moving is the biggest things. It used to be quite hard to get funding for removals- even though is vital and can be a sticking point.”

One client was in an abusive relationship which was related to financial issues. Being able to access money to pay for 2/3 nights’ accommodation helped to minimise the increments of debt. The organisation stated that those exiting the criminal justice system need to be able to access cash for their practical needs (often whilst they wait for their benefits to be processed).

For many of the staff working with women (and families) fleeing domestic violence, the cash grants offer the individual the means to move on. Without the fast access to financial resources to move the family into safe accommodation, the individual may not be able to get out of the situation, as other forms of statutory support can take time to come to fruition.

In some circumstances, the cash grant does not act as a specific enabler of ‘more’ change, it instead may maintain an outcome or prevent negative outcomes from occurring. Staff felt that it helped “pull things together” - it was part of the process but not a step in itself. This was especially true for those supporting vulnerable individuals to move into housing; many came with nothing and were offered housing which was unfurnished and sparse. For individuals in vulnerable positions, especially those with caring responsibilities, the challenges of building their future from scratch without anything in their house was too overwhelming, and they returned to their previous situations. In this situation the cash grant mitigated the stress attached to feeling overwhelming, rather than improving other outcomes.

In some cases, staff felt some outcomes, such as reduced psychosocial stress, would not be achieved without resolution of the pressing financial need. This was also reflected in DWP’s own qualitative research, whereby participants were found to be anxious and completely preoccupied with their financial situation - something that is likely to hinder them from making good decisions. Indeed, DWP’s own research found that clients identified “theft” as one way out of their desperate situation, something that is unlikely to help them move into a more positive place.

In addition, if an immediate need, such as housing away from a violent ex-partner, cannot be met, then the individual may not get to
the place of short term safety, and therefore cannot progress to some of the longer term changes.

In short, cash grants are part of an overall package of support which has to help people build the foundations for a future for themselves and their family. The funding offered is a way of helping them to identify their immediate needs, which are stopping them from moving forward. Without the cash grants, most staff felt that their job would become even more challenging. There are many things that tailored, intense support can do, but without some additional tangible resources, it is not always enough to support individuals with severe and multiple disadvantage to move forward.
Appendix 1: Staff interview questions

Introduction: the purpose of our telephone interviews is to speak with staff to understand their experiences of supporting people to access cash grants, and the effect that it has on these individuals and their families. We have undertaken a workshop with representatives of each of the referral organisations and will use these interviews to complement the stories we heard.

1. Please can you briefly describe your role and how you support individuals and families.
2. How often have you supported clients to access cash grants? Which organisations have you supported them to apply to?
3. When you have supported someone to access a cash grant (from whichever source), what has their initial reaction been? Is there anything that you see change immediately? Apart from their “purchase”, do you see any other changes? If it helps to use an example, please do.
4. After they have accessed a cash grant, what changes have you seen in the individuals you have supported? How does it help you to provide your support?
5. To what extent do you think the cash grant supports people to achieve longer term changes? What part does it play?
6. Are there any negative effects of someone accessing a cash grant?
7. If there were no cash grants available, what difference would it make to the people you support, if any?

Thank you for your help.
Appendix 2: Partner organisations

The following organisations are partners in the Open Doors programme:

Bethany Christian Trust
Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid
Eaves
FA West Kent Intensive Family Services
Family Action: Families First, Newham
Hull Lighthouse
ISIS Women's Centre/Nelson Trust
Local Solutions (3 sites)
Richmond Fellowship
Riverside
St Mungo’s
Street Talk
Together Women Project
Women @ the well
Women Centre Ltd
Cash grants are financial support offered to individuals and families to support an immediate short term need and ease exceptional pressure. They are often means-tested and targeted at those who are severely disadvantaged.

The Open Doors programme builds on previous Welfare Grant programmes operated by Family Action. This programme has been developed in light of the changing schemes operated by the government at national and local level.

Stakeholder engagement found that the strength of the programme lies in six elements:

1. The support and cash grants are offered through non-statutory agencies. It is a choice for these individuals to engage with the agency. This enables them to build up trust with their support worker. So they can help them to explore their needs and what could be the negative consequences of any actions. The support offered is focused on the person and their needs.

2. Cash grants offer individuals a way of effectively and quickly meeting their short-term needs. They are flexible and responsive; a panel will meet every two weeks to make decisions on funding. They offer individuals the opportunity to relieve exceptional financial pressure, helping people to make a positive step, or reduce the chance of their progress being hampered.

3. The services are delivered in a humanistic way—answering the question “how would you like to be treated?” They explore people’s dreams and goals through support planning, prioritising their needs and then offering support through a difficult time. The focus is on understanding the impact, a ‘positive step’, and what this means for the recipient. Through effective planning support workers can assess where recipients are in terms of being able to manage and use the money, supporting only those in the right position to apply for funding.

4. The Open Door programme offers cash grants only as part of a package of support. In the past, some recipients may have felt that money was ‘a way of getting rid of them’. If they are given money, they will go away and not have to be supported. Accessing cash grants as part of a package of support shows that the staff want to be able to see them again.

5. Cash grants and the support services that help them are a way of receiving something without conditions: they do not need to do anything in return; there is no requirement to pay back the cash. This might be the first time that the individual has had this experience. They also offer support in a non-
judgemental way. For example some local authorities offer pre-paid supermarket cards which can only be spent on certain items: other items are 'judged' to be non-essential. One staff member commented "We don’t spend on what we need, it’s what we want." Giving people the option to define what the need without conditions enables them to experience this too.

6. Support services (and access to cash) can offer recipients the opportunity to have new experiences, to be exposed to things that have not had in the past. This can help them to review their wider opportunities. Having positive experience and success can build their capacity to react to future events.
Endnotes

10. https://www.google.com/search?q=national+accounts+of+well+being&oq=national+account&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j69i59j0i4.3947j0j7&sourceid=chrome&espv=210&ie=UTF-8