



A Formative Evaluation of Me2 Club

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1. Executive Summary

This evaluation was commissioned by Me2 Club to assess the difference the charity makes to the lives of children and young people with additional needs and their families, as well as drawing together learning on what works well or could be improved in how it delivers its services. It draws on the interviews with a cross-section of 22 stakeholders as well as desk review research taking into account an online consultation from 2016.

It finds that Me2 Club has established a strong reputation for effective support with families, volunteers and external organisations in enabling children and young people with additional needs to access mainstream activities. Its tailored and flexible response to the needs of children based on a well-developed process of volunteer matching, in-house training and ongoing support leads to a range of positive outcomes for the charity. In summary these are:

- Supporting the integration and independence of children and young people with additional needs into mainstream activities.
- Increasing awareness and encouraging a positive attitude to difference and diversity among mainstream children and young people participating in shared activities.
- Building children and young peoples' confidence and motivation.
- Developing new opportunities for children and young people with additional needs.
- Creating meaningful and valued volunteering opportunities.
- Specialist support for families of children with additional needs and the leaders of local activities through inclusion and bespoke training.

Families value the regular, open and informal communication that underpins Me2 Club's approach and feel able to influence the development of the organisation's services. The potential for families to self-refer to Me2 Club was also highlighted as a unique strength. External organisations and activity leaders see the benefit of Me2 Club's work in increasing their capacity to open up activities to children with additional needs, and the resultant positive change to mainstream children/young people's awareness of additional needs and disabled children.

The evaluation puts forward a set of recommendations in section 6 for consideration by Me2 Club for its future development, summarised below:

- Continuing to develop opportunities for young people in the transition into teenage years and into adulthood.
- Recruiting and making the most of the Me2 Club's volunteers, including growth in recruiting volunteers beyond school age; the potential for some of the young people supported by Me2 Club to become volunteers themselves; maximising the potential of volunteers as a future resource; developing Me2 Club's ongoing training for volunteers.
- Widening Me2 Club's geographical coverage.
- Developing support for children with more challenging needs.
- Diversifying income – from families, former volunteers and through the further development of its inclusion and bespoke training.

- Developing evaluation systems that are relevant and manageable – including making more of the data that Me2 Club has and utilising online applications; capturing learning from volunteers more systematically.
- Maintaining and building engagement with families.

Me2 Club has identified a unique need in supporting children and young people with additional needs to access mainstream services, while also developing new opportunities for this user group. This is the result of a skilled and experienced staff, volunteer and trustee team – with a clear vision for the organisation’s role and its potential to develop in future. This evaluation report provides evidence of the significant positive change to children and young people’s confidence, independence and motivation that result from its work and provides a stimulus for future development building on its existing strengths.

2. Aims of the evaluation project

Me 2 Club commissioned Richard Usher of Just Ideas Sustainable Solutions Ltd to provide an evaluation of the charity with the following aims:

- To assess the difference that Me2 Club is making to the children and families it works with, exploring what has worked well within the Me2 Club services, the efficacy of the organisation's approach to achieving its objectives and how this could be built on in future.
- To understand the needs of children and families in a context of austerity and cuts to local authority services as well as children/families' ability to shape the services of Me2 Club.
- To identify whether these needs are met or could be met through further development, project work and new funding.
- To explore what could be done better or differently in future, learning from the experience the charity has of delivering its services.
- To understand the benefit of working with volunteers and assess what the experience means to the predominantly young volunteers that the charity involves.

The project was undertaken between May and July 2017. Me2 Club also requested that, following consideration of existing monitoring and evaluation processes, proposals be put forward to strengthen the organisation's monitoring and evaluation work.

3. Methodology

The project is described as a formative evaluation as it aims to enable Me2 Club to draw on qualitative feedback from families, staff, volunteers and external organisations to establish what the charity is currently achieving with children and young people and to feed this learning into its future development and priorities. The evaluation process involved engaging with the full range of stakeholders in relation to Me2 Club's work through twenty two interviewees:

- Semi-structured interviews with a total of seven parents/families
- Semi-structured face to face interviews with four staff members
- Semi-structured face to face and phone interviews with four trustees
- Semi-structured phone interviews with three volunteers
- Semi-structured phone interviews with four external partner organisation including both statutory and voluntary sector organisations working with additional needs or disabled children and young people (and their families), as well as corporate partners
- Desk review of relevant background information including the charity's annual reports, website, feedback/evaluation forms from training events and activities over the last year and results of an online consultation completed in 2016.

A list of interviewees is included within Appendix 1 of this report.

4. Background to Me2 Club – its context and approach

In order to understand the context for the evaluation this section provides some background information about Me2 Club, as well as the specific issues it faces in evaluating and measuring the outcomes of its work.

The organisation constituted itself as an unincorporated association on 17th March 2003 through the adoption of its constitution and registered as a Charity on 5th July 2004. The organisation transferred its activities to a Registered Charity and Company limited by guarantee (Me2 Club) and has worked under its new status since 1st April 2011.

Me2 Club has the following three aims:

- Recruiting, training and developing volunteers to support children and young people (5-19) with additional needs to attend a mainstream activity of their choice.
- Encouraging young people to be independent from their families by attending a weekly mainstream activity and attending Me2 Club Weekends Away.
- Providing Inclusion and Bespoke Training to activity leaders to make groups more accessible.

This is delivered by a staff team of four from the charity's office in Woodley within the Wokingham Borough local authority area.

Evaluation within the organisation: Feedback and evaluation processes are already in place within Me2 Club but there is a strong desire to make them more systematic and robust. Existing approaches have been driven partly by the need to evidence project outcomes for funders and because of the importance placed on feedback and learning within the organisation. Currently Me2 Club collects significant information and data through feedback forms completed by volunteers after training; participants on inclusion and bespoke training courses; child and volunteer participants in activities (weekends away and special day events) and from parents. Me2 Club has explored use of SurveyMonkey (in an online consultation) but would require a purchased licence to have the capacity to develop this further across the organisation.

The challenge of measuring 'soft' outcomes: Like many other organisations working to support additional needs and disabled children and young people Me2 Club faces a challenge in demonstrating outcomes which are mostly 'soft' – i.e. the improved confidence, happiness and sociability of children enabled to take part in mainstream activities. This is in contrast to organisations with the more straightforward task of gathering 'hard' data such as the number of people taking up employment as a result of an organisation's support. Enabling children and young people with additional needs and disabilities to give feedback and evaluate also presents a challenge to Me2 Club, particularly in cases where the child being supported is non-verbal. There is an opportunity here for Me2 Club to become and be seen as a specialist in this area – good practice already exists within the organisation and can be developed further (it was noted for example that some evaluation forms for children had been used after events – using clear language and appropriate graphic/picture elements where possible such as a range of smiley to unhappy faces for children to give their feedback). There is also a strong case to continue use of the case studies and

quotations from children, young people and their families both to provide qualitative evidence of the difference that the organisation makes and to demonstrate this to the wider public (with the marketing and fundraising benefits that this will bring).

Funding context: Me2 Club funds its work through a variety of grant funders (this has included Big Lottery and Children in Need), direct donations, corporate support (in particularly volunteer time and fundraising events) with some funding from Wokingham Borough Council for specific activities. The organisation values its independence and the clarity of the role it takes in supporting its users as a result of this funding mix. Changes to payments for families with children who require support from local health or social care services may have implications for Me2 Club that it will need to respond to: for instance the move to direct payments¹. One family interviewed for the evaluation described the responsibility that this now places on parents to ‘buy in’ necessary personal care when a son or daughter reaches the age of 16. In this context Me2 Club’s support becomes part of a broader range of options for families to consider – with some potential for paid for personal assistants to replace the role that Me2 Club’s volunteers had taken. However Me2 Club’s role remains significant particularly for families who are not receiving direct payments for their children beyond the age of 16. It will be important for Me2 Club to monitor the impact these changes have over time and articulate the benefit of Me2 Club’s specific support for young people and their families.

Work with other additional needs/disability organisations: Interview feedback from colleagues within Wokingham Borough and other additional needs or disabled children organisations was that Me2 Club is a reliable and engaged organisation within the network. It is part of the new SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) forum set up by the voluntary sector in Wokingham, and a **respected partner** with a track record of successful delivery.

Overall feedback from the interviews undertaken suggests **rising need for Me2 Club’s** services for a variety of reasons: a growing profile among families of children with additional needs partly as a result of word of mouth and through the organisation’s activities at local events/through social media and referral from other organisations; and the prevailing austerity agenda of cuts to services for children with additional needs which has reduced available support from local authorities:

“The demand has always been there – more and more you either have very specialist activities [for children with disabilities solely] or mainstream stuff that our kids can’t do on their own. Specialist services are also under pressure with funding cuts.” (External Organisation)

Some respondents suggested that a positive trend for Me2 Club is that activity leaders and schools have increased their knowledge and skills in relation to integrating and including children and young people with additional needs – which Me2 Club has also supported through its inclusion training programme for activity leaders in a range of areas: after school clubs, Bikeability, Cubs and football coaches being some examples.

¹ Direct payments are local Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust payments for people who have been assessed as needing help from social services, and who would like to arrange and pay for their own care and support services instead of receiving them directly from the local trust.

5. Analysis

This section of the report uses the qualitative feedback from volunteers, parents, staff, trustees, activity leader and stakeholders from external organisations to assess the difference that Me2 Club is currently making with the children, young people and families it supports.

5.1 Me2 Club's principles and approach to support

Feedback from all stakeholder groups emphasised the unique, flexible and tailored support that Me2 Club is able to provide as a result of working with volunteers and the robust process of matching trained volunteers with children and young people. Figure 1 summarises how **Me2 Club's approach to support** focusing on enabling children and young people with additional needs to take part in mainstream activities:



Figure 1: Me2 Club's principles and approach to support

The **matching process of volunteers with children and their families was highly rated** on the basis of its tailored and individualised response to each child or young person's need, interests and activities. The process fosters a **strong rapport** between Me2 staff, volunteers, families and children – highlighted by all in the evaluation interviews: *"There's a very comprehensive assessment, I always felt reassured that they had selected the right people [volunteers]."* (Parent)

"[We have] a great relationship and rapport with families – they feel they can talk to us." (Staff)

"It's about consistency, someone you can trust, a confidante in a way – to help development and progress. Before he didn't interact with the other children [in the swimming class] – now he does." (Volunteer)

The **quality of training** provided for volunteers is high – *“training is very good, the volunteers are always very supportive”* (Parent). This was reiterated in the desk review of feedback forms from the volunteer training events, with trainee volunteers rating the training highly in their qualitative feedback. With more systematic use of the feedback forms (recording and collecting scores from the forms in a spreadsheet) Me2 Club would have a valuable source of evaluation data and the ability to compare outcomes/ratings between course cohorts.

There was agreement across all stakeholders that **Me2 Club provides a distinctive and unique support service** within the context of other additional needs and disability organisations locally:

“It’s unique – I’ve never come across another organisation like it.” (Trustee and Parent)

“Without them we wouldn’t be able to accommodate girls with additional needs. We have two Me2 Club girls in the Guide group. The volunteer support is very valuable – we can see how parents appreciate what their daughters get out of going to guides.” (Activity Leader)

Me2 Club’s uniqueness both within the geographical area it serves and more widely, was identified by interview respondents as a key strength – there is a distinct need and niche for the support that the organisation provides. This puts Me2 Club in a strong position if it wishes to work with other organisations or develop or grow its services locally: *“There is a gap in other [local] areas.”* (External Organisation)

Evaluation interviewees felt that they had they **were able to influence** and have their say in how Me2 Club delivers and develops its services. The organisation was started by parent volunteers and this focus on its original client group is borne out in existing governance arrangements: *“there have always been 2 or 3 parents on the Trustee committee.”* (Parent and Trustee) Me2 Club also makes the most of the events it runs which involve the whole family, for feedback. Families and external organisations indicated that the organisation is open to feedback either informally over the phone or in post-event feedback/evaluation forms, through the newsletter or at events such as the AGM:

“We always go to the AGM – it’s nice to listen to what’s happening and have your say!” (Parent)

“I’ve never had any hesitation in making a suggestion. You can just pick up the phone or drop an e-mail.” (Parent)

“We can contact Me2 Club directly with any ideas or issues, in the early stages of a volunteer supporting a child they will come down and join in. We’re very much in communication with them.” (Activity Leader)

“The newsletter is a fantastic way of representing the support we gave in doing a fundraising event.” (Activity Leader)

Families interviewed for the evaluation cited the benefit of Me2 Club’s independence (from local authority provision) and the **ability to self-refer to the organisation**, rather than requiring a diagnosis which may entail a longer process of appointments etc. before a professional decision is reached: *“it’s really empowering to know that you can do that. We are so used to filling in lots of*

forms!” (Parent) In the context of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) this can be a two year process:

“It’s important for parents to see us as independent, and that we don’t discriminate [in relation to who we support] on the basis of the Council telling us.” (Trustee)

Me2 Club works effectively with other specialist organisations locally, sometimes ‘teaming up’ to provide support where a family’s needs are complex – Assist (support for children on the autistic spectrum), Wokingham, Bracknell and Districts Mencap and Dingley’s Promise were mentioned specifically:

“We work with each other, where there have been families in crisis, or on the verge of crisis for social services. Both organisations working together can give that support.” (External Organisation)

“We support families where a child is diagnosed with Autism... so we’re able to signpost families to them, as well as talk with Me2 Club staff when extra or bespoke support is needed.” (External Organisation)

Me2 Club’s **flexibility in the support it offers** is highly valued: one parent interviewed had been through the process of registering with Me2 Club and accessing support for her daughter to attend Girls Brigade. She acknowledged Me2 Club’s flexibility and the transparency of their matching process throughout her contact with the organisation – in finding a place at Girls Brigade and trying it before volunteer support was available, she realised that her daughter was able to participate in sessions without Me2 Club’s support. However she appreciated the organisation’s clarity that the support would be open should it be needed: *“[Me2 Club] is responsive to the needs of children with additional needs – and how that need is expressed with parents.”* (Volunteer)

Future challenges: Both staff and the families interviewed highlighted some of the challenges that face the organisation in working with younger volunteers – the most obvious of these being sustaining young volunteers’ involvement in the organisation (particularly in light of the investment made in volunteers through thorough training provided by Me2 Club). Some proposals are made in the final section of this report on the potential to increase retention of volunteers, including the motivation of accessing further training. A further area identified by families was the need for support with young people as they finish school, as well as looking at continuing to extend the age range of volunteers that organisation works with.

5.2 The difference Me2 Club makes with children, young people and their families

A number of thematic outcome areas were identified through the evaluation process:

5.2.1 Supporting the integration and independence of children and young people with additional needs

In its main aim of integrating children and young people with additional needs and disabilities Me2 Club creates new opportunities for these children as well as normalising the participation of these children in mainstream groups and activities. Volunteers and families cited how important this is for all involved: raising awareness and increasing understanding of children with additional needs

amongst the mainstream participants in activities, and supporting learning and an accepting attitude to difference and diversity: *“getting used to difference, not standing and staring.”* (Volunteer)
One volunteer commented that it was this being *“part of an activity that happens quite naturally”* in a context of other children without additional needs that marks Me2 Club’s approach out. The following feedback is indicative of the strength of evidence in this area:

“The great thing is that children are able to join in with the activities their peers are going to – Cubs, Scouts, swimming, drama. If you have a child with additional needs they can’t do everything they want, at worst could get isolated. Me2 Club creates the opportunity to feel ‘normal’.” (Parent)

“From the outside the volunteer was just another member of the drama group.” (Parent)

“Brilliant – [my daughter] was able to access the activity without me, there’s a sense of independence for her as the relationship with the volunteers built up, she felt confident and it improved her sense of identity.” (Former parent – External Organisation)

“The main thing is that the child with a disability is included, from that they’re able to have fun and do what they want to do.” (External Organisation)

“I support an autistic boy with swimming... he needs someone there to keep him on track, he wouldn’t take part without support.” (Volunteer)

“For the girl I support [at a Woodcraft group] it’s nice for her to be in an environment without her mum.” (Volunteer)

5.2.2 Building children and young peoples’ confidence and motivation

“Confidence is a wide umbrella! For my son it was the ability to speak up for himself, knowing what’s appropriate, and having that back up and support on hand [from a Me2 Club volunteer].” (Parent)

Me2 Club’s support through volunteers and additional activities such as weekend events and days away foster confidence and improve the motivation of the children and young people with additional needs that are involved. There is a spectrum of outcomes related to confidence: staff gave examples of children reaching a point (dependent on their level of impairment or need) at which they no longer needed support having built the confidence and motivation to a point at which they become independent in a social or activity setting; for others the experience of attending an activity, getting to know a cohort of peers and enjoying that ongoing, consistent activity results in incremental improvements to confidence (often associated with increased ability to communicate and take part in activities):

“One child we supported at Sea Scouts, he then went along to a drama group and does another mainstream group without support.” (Staff)

“It gives E that little bit of extra confidence, otherwise she’d be hanging back.” (Parent)

“Our young people find big group activities anxiety producing. With a volunteer they’re able to access those activities once a week, otherwise they would probably avoid them. Me2 Club works in a thoughtful way and that helps build confidence and self-esteem.” (External Organisation)

"[The support] made a tremendous difference. Over the six years it was part of the process for one girl who progressed from being in a wheelchair to walking with a frame ... from having no verbal skills to trying to sing happy birthday! It also encourages the other girls to make sure they feel included... about how they adapt what they do to children with additional needs." (Activity Leader)

"I take a young girl to a gym session. It's made a positive impact – she has really come out of her shell a bit, and it is the family's first time with Me2 Club." (Volunteer)

"One young girl doing a swim class had been in the same group for two years – she moved up within a term having a volunteer for support." (Staff)

The relationship between children/young people and volunteers is vital to this process – with a key element of this being that the volunteers are 'relatable' and able to empathise with some of the issues experienced by the children or young people supported. Parents of children who had had Me2 Club support spoke of the benefit of these relationships which may continue beyond the period of support, a further important facet of social development for their children. In a context involving teenage young people Me2 Club volunteers provide a vital facilitation role which enables interaction when there may otherwise be awkwardness: *"As kids get older they find it more awkward relating – our volunteer was good at facilitating that, helping him get in to a group – social times are the most important for the support."* (Parent)

5.2.3 Developing new opportunities for children and young people with additional needs

Me2 Club works with existing activities and groups in the Wokingham Borough area but has shown awareness of the need to respond to family feedback in developing events and activities of its own. One example of this is a recent 'Day Away' – trip to Bournemouth aimed at teenagers.

"[There was] amazing feedback from the young people and parents. A few hours respite for parents – it was a result of listening to families, looking at what is holding them back." (Staff)

Participation in the local groups also creates new opportunities and experiences for children and young people with additional needs:

"The biggest impact was when he got to perform at the Albert Hall and O2 as part of his drama group!" (Parent)

"[The volunteer support] helps them to develop as a person, as they push themselves to do and explore new things." (Volunteer)

Feedback from the evaluation interviews suggested that activities for teenagers with additional needs will be a priority in future, in a context of reducing numbers of mainstream youth groups and a lack of other opportunities for this age group. Families identified: the need to manage the transition from the support that Me2 Club offers as young people move on to become adults (with the changes in statutory support available); and support with moving on to further education and employment – *"Would it be possible to look at how volunteers could support [a young person with additional needs] once they finish school: help with going for interviews or workshops that will help them move on? I needed that sort of help when my eldest was at that stage."* (Parent)

5.2.4 Creating meaningful and valued volunteering opportunities

Volunteering within Me2 Club provides a unique experience both for the volunteer and the child/young person being supported. As noted above there were examples given of the potential for this to be a constructive relationship bond beyond the placement *“a couple of volunteers have stayed in touch [with my daughter] (Parent)*. Volunteers learn about the specific skills required to support children and young people with additional needs and in some cases this experience leads to a career path in working with children or more generally in health and social care:

“[Volunteering] helped me apply skills to everyday life – I’ve got a job that involves children so it’s also good for my CV. I plan to work with children in future.” (Volunteer)

The benefits for confidence and learning new skills are applicable to volunteers involved with Me2 as well as the children and young people the organisation supports: *“I’ve seen in them how much confidence they gain, showing calmness [in supporting a child] and being able to explain clearly what is happening in an activity.” (Staff)*

There was feedback from existing volunteers that Me2 Club provides ‘meaningful’ volunteering opportunities: the chance to make a real, positive difference in someone’s life and this was highly valued and motivational for volunteers.

The constructive ‘triangle’ relationship between volunteers, staff and families is facilitated by training, open and informal communication channels with Activity and Volunteer Co-ordinators resulting in a sound understanding of the Me2 Club volunteer role. These are attributes that Me2 Club should ensure it sustains as it develops in future.

One limitation on accessing Me2 Club’s support was the waiting list that exists for some of the groups and activities that are relevant to Me2 Club children. Parents asked whether it would be possible to work with providers to establish a priority system with activity leaders – not dissimilar to the way in which children with additional needs are given priority access to mainstream schools where suitable support is available.

5.2.5 Specialist support for families of children with additional needs

Without exception the families interviewed in the evaluation process praised the quality of support and responsiveness of staff when needed, particularly in the early days of a volunteer supporting a child or if there were any concerns over how the support from a volunteer was working out:

“One volunteer didn’t work out so well, she didn’t see that she needed to step back rather than providing ‘overwhelming’ support. But Me2 Club sorted that out quickly.” (Parent)

Though not the main aim of support to the children, a child’s time with a volunteer does also provide a brief respite for parents with 24-7 caring responsibilities as well as precious time with other siblings: *“It can give parents a bit of time... for their other children.” (External Organisation)*

Families praised clear and regular communication which was also appropriately informal: *“I felt it was very much like joining a family. You can choose to take part in events, such as Easter and Summer, which would be huge deal for parents if they were feeling isolated. ” (Parent)*

Fitting both with support to families and working with local partners, Me2 Club also has a role to play in 'Child in Need' meetings with local authority and other professionals involved in supporting children, young people with specific needs and their families. One example was of a young person who had been excluded from school for behaviour issues, but did not exhibit these behaviours from Me2 Club's experience of working with the same child in a drama group setting.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The evaluation process finds that Me2 Club has established a strong reputation with the cross section of stakeholders interviewed, in its support of children and young people with additional needs. Its tailored and flexible response to the needs of children based on a well-developed matching process with volunteers that are trained and supported themselves leads to a range of positive outcomes for the organisation. In summary these are:

- Supporting the integration and independence of children and young people with additional needs into mainstream activities.
- Increasing awareness and encouraging a positive attitude to difference and diversity among mainstream children and young people participating in shared activities.
- Building children and young peoples' confidence and motivation.
- Developing new opportunities for children and young people with additional needs.
- Creating meaningful and valued volunteering opportunities.
- Specialist support for families of children with additional needs and the leaders of local activities through inclusion and bespoke training.

Families value the regular, open and informal communication that underpins Me2 Club's approach and feel able to influence the development of the organisation's services. The potential for families to self-refer to Me2 Club was also highlighted as a unique strength. External organisations and activity leaders see the benefit of Me2 Club's work in increasing their capacity to open up activities to children with additional needs, and the resultant positive change to mainstream children/young people's awareness of additional needs and disabled children.

Thinking ahead about how Me2 Club can build on its strengths and develop those areas that are identified either as challenges or gaps within the organisation currently it is hoped that following recommendations will be useful to the organisation:

- a. Continuing to develop opportunities for young people in the transition into teenage years and into adulthood.** The evaluation noted the challenge that presents young people and their families when particularly between the ages of 16-18 and in the transition post-18. For Me2 Club this area of work is likely to involve recruiting older volunteers to support these young people – and expanding the weekends and day out activities targeting this age range. There may be potential to focus more on local colleges and the University of Reading in recruiting new volunteers in this. Parents were interested in the potential to look at buddying approaches and individual activities such as badminton, tennis and ice skating, but this raises issues around managing lone volunteers with vulnerable young people. There is potential to work with other local charities and the local authority to build potential

linkages, and identify what transition teenagers and young adults identify as priorities for themselves (in relation social and recreational activities).

b. Recruiting and making the most the Me2 Club's volunteers. The report identifies the ongoing challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers as young volunteers are particularly likely to move on or away. One response to this is in recruiting volunteers beyond school age (also pertinent to point a. above). There are a number of further ideas which are relevant to retaining volunteers and making the most of their contribution beyond their time of direct involvement with Me2 Club:

- Existing volunteer feedback suggested keeping the application process as streamlined as possible so as to avoid drop off between people expressing interest and becoming a Me2 Club volunteer.
- Is there potential for some of the young people supported by Me2 Club to become volunteers themselves? This would be another way of challenging the perception that 'I can't do that'.
- The experience and connection with the organisation that volunteers have represents a valuable source of potential future support – keeping in touch via social media or the newsletter may provide a basis from which ex-volunteers becoming more involved in future e.g. donating, raising funds or linking their companies to Me2 Club.
- Are there opportunities to further develop training as a means of demonstrating the value that Me2 Club sees in the commitment made by volunteers? Volunteers value the initial training – further training would be likely to motivate volunteers to stay with the organisation.

c. Widening Me2 Club's geographical coverage. Within the staff team and trustee teams there is awareness that Me2 Club's unique approach is applicable to other local authority areas, though this would need due consideration of the staff, infrastructure and funding support required. Me2 Club's approach is replicable and this could be considered by Trustees in thinking about the longer term sustainability and development of the organisation.

d. Developing support for children with more challenging needs. There is potential to work with the Respite Centre (Bridges Resources Centre) on this area of work: supporting staff and volunteers when children have complex, multiple needs. One former parent mentioned an experience of her child not being able to attend an overnight event due to her needs, understanding this position but 'would be good'. Some staff and volunteer feedback suggested that participating in training from outside organisations (such as Bridges) could assist in this area:

"A lot of the training focuses on working with children with Autism. Now I'm with a girl with more challenging needs I am not sure I would have had the necessary confidence if the activity leader didn't have that background [supporting children with complex needs]."
(Volunteer)

e. Diversifying income – from families, former volunteers and training provision. Most families interviewed indicated that they would be willing to pay a membership fee, or make an annual donation to the organisation. Me2 Club will need to assess how much is feasible within the current economic climate but making a transparent case with the cost of the volunteer training, support and the events that Me2 Club runs will help with this. Continuing to develop and promote inclusion and bespoke training to other relevant organisations as a

charged for service is a further opportunity for Me2 Club – external organisations view Me2 Club as a specialist inclusion training provider for staff and volunteers: *“Our staff have gone through the Me2 Club training – there’s cross fertilisation of ideas and resources.”* (External Organisation)

- f. Developing evaluation systems that are relevant and manageable.** As noted the organisation already has feedback and evaluation systems in place – the future priority will be to make these more systematic, data more readily available and ensure that the involvement of various stakeholders is as snappy as possible. There are some guiding approaches that will be useful:
- Continuing to ask evaluative questions every time Me2 Club something – the format for this (whether verbal feedback or survey/feedback sheet) will depend on the activity. Being clear about ‘what difference has Me2 Club’s support made’ is essential.
 - Making more of the data that Me2 Club has. The evaluation recommends that it will be worthwhile Me2 Club buying a licence to use an online survey application more fully such as SurveyMonkey. The investment (currently £288) will save considerable time in processing data and enable surveys to be shared online with volunteers, families, activity leaders and other organisations when needed.
 - Capture learning from volunteers more systematically: at present there are effective and open communication channels between staff and volunteers. This works well on an informal basis. A more systematic approach (for example a brief annual online survey) could allow Me2 Club to capitalise on this front line experience including the potential to yield case studies etc. More consistent exit interviews with volunteers and with families who leave would also strengthen Me2 Club’s knowledge of the difference it makes. There is also an opportunity to integrate into volunteer training a session looking at how volunteers can help with providing evaluative feedback in their work with children and young people: drawing out their creative ideas for integrating evaluation while maintaining the informality and trust-based relationships that underpin Me2 Club’s work. Bringing together more experienced volunteers for a focus group with a similar aim of teasing out ideas and engaging approaches to evaluation with the children and young people they are supporting has further potential for developing this area of work.
 - Increasing the voice of Me2 Club’s children and young people in evaluation. Me2 Club’s range of events (particularly weekend and Summer/Christmas celebrations) present an opportunity to engage with children and young people in the evaluation process – this may be through observing; creating a ‘what I like about Me2 Club’ board with support from volunteers to draw or stick post-its with feedback on; smiley face ratings for events (which the organisation has already introduced); use of video/smart phone footage to capture verbal feedback which, with permission, could be posted via social media or on the Me2 Club website. Openness to trying different approaches is the main principle for success in this area of work as well as drawing out the input and creative ideas of children, young people and volunteers in how they would like to be involved in ‘having their say’. See appendix 2, in particular the ‘Participation Works’ resource, for further examples of approaches, activities and templates that can adapted and developed to fit Me2 Club’s work.

- g. Maintaining and building engagement with families.** Despite the reported openness of communication between staff, volunteers and families, staff identified a need to continue to develop more of 'two way relationship' with families such as commitment to participating in family events (in particular Easter, Summer and Christmas events), where Me2 Club have run events in response to families' expressed need. Though there is awareness that Me2 Club's role is specific and fulfils a need within the bigger picture of family life. The organisation is active on social media (Twitter; Facebook) and there was positive feedback on the regular newsletter which is sent to all organisational contacts (positive feedback in particular for the way in which it recognises the contribution of volunteers, local companies and funders). Me2 Club has a 'family agreement' – this could also incorporate a commitment to communication and engagement with the organisation and its activities. Introducing home visits every two years to check in with families where support is ongoing would benefit this relationship and provide an opportunity for evaluation/understanding the journey of change for children and their families.

Me2 Club has identified a unique need in supporting children and young people with additional needs to access mainstream services, while also developing new opportunities for this user group. This is the result of a skilled and experienced staff and volunteer team – with a clear vision for the organisation's role and its potential to develop in future. This evaluation report provides evidence of the significant positive change to children and young people's confidence, independence and motivation that result from its work and provides a stimulus for future development building on its existing strengths.

Appendix 1 – Interviewees

Tess Eagles - Manager, Me2 Club

Leanne Simonds - Activities & Volunteers Coordinator, Me 2 Club

Nikki Tee - Activities & Volunteers Coordinator, Me2 Club

Liz McDaniel - Fundraising Development Officer, Me2 Club

For confidentiality the names of the parents/families and external stakeholders have been withheld, but the following groups/individuals were interviewed during the evaluation process:

5 parents/families supported by Me2 Club

2 parents and Trustees of Me2 Club

2 further Trustees (including Chair of Trustees)

Corporate Supporter, Sage

Corporate Supporter, Magal

Activity Leader (Guides)

Activity Leader (Beavers)

3 Me2 Club Volunteers

CEO, Building for the Future and former parent

CEO, Wokingham, Bracknell and Districts Mencap

Senior Autism Support Officer, ASSIST, Wokingham Borough Council

Appendix 2

Resources exploring the participation of disabled children and young people (particularly in decision making related to social care, and evaluation activities)

The Participation of Disabled Children and Young People: A Social Justice Perspective McNeilly, P., Macdonald, G., & Kelly, B. (2015).

<http://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/files/17228570/participation.pdf>

Evaluating Participation Work: The Toolkit Produced by NCB on behalf of Participation Works, (2008)

An excellent resource for examples of forms, questions and activities – see in particular the section on ‘Information gathering and discussion activities for groups’

http://www.participationworks.org.uk/files/webfm/files/resources/k-items/participationworks/diy_evaluation_toolkit/diy_evaluation_toolkit/index.pdf

Participation of Disabled Children and Young People in Decision-Making Relating To Social Care DFES (2006)

<https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/decision.pdf>

Children and Participation: Research, monitoring and evaluation with children and young people Save the Children

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/children_and_partipation_1.pdf

Organisations with a similar approach to Me2 Club nationwide – sharing good practice:

Integrating Children is based in the North East (Durham; Chester-le-Street)

<http://www.integratingchildren.co.uk/>



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