



Voices from Manchester's voluntary, community and social enterprise sector on the response to Covid-19 and their thoughts for the future



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Throughout the publication, you will find pages of quotes from the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission

**@TruthPoverty #ExpertsByExperience
#ThisShouldAlwaysBeNormal**

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Foreword

Mike Wild, Chief Executive, Macc

Covid-19 has caused pain and loss for all of us directly and indirectly. I hear people calling 2020 a year that must simply be “written off” but as always in a crisis, the response in communities is the adrenaline which kicks in and strengthens our ability to cope. We may not look back fondly on 2020 but there is a lot we can learn from it.

Over the last few months, Manchester’s voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations have responded amazingly to the crisis. They have remade services so people can stay connected and supported during lockdown, worked to ensure nobody is left without access to food, shelter, care, wellbeing support, mental health support, creative activities – and support around pre-existing matters which had nothing directly to do with Covid-19, such as work with survivors of sexual abuse and domestic violence. They have done their best to help people get by. Our public services too have responded magnificently but without the extra lifting power of VCSE organisations, they would be overwhelmed: we have seen how our collective ecosystem really works and there is much to build on for the future. We have seen for example that collaboration unlocks a far wider range of potential and resources and while a command and control approach is an important function in managing the response to an emergency, leadership, partnership and existing relationships have been important.

As the crisis has rolled on, the phrase I’ve heard most from colleagues in local VCSE organisations is that they have been “working harder than ever before”. That says a lot coming from a group of people who are used to making things happen with limited resources.

The sector’s resilience has been tested in ways few of us have ever experienced. That this has taken place at the same time as a sudden drop in fundraising and other activities which generate income for VCSE organisations, speaks to their dedication to make a difference when they are most needed. It is estimated there has been a loss of over £10 billion in the sector across the country. Yet this has not deterred Manchester VCSE organisations from responding. It may mean they have burned through their reserves (literally and metaphorically) and created a problem of long term sustainability but – as one leader I spoke to put it so simply: “if not now, then when?”.

“

We have seen Manchester’s marvellously diverse, vibrant, messy, gumption-filled, voluntary, community and social enterprise sector rise to the challenge of the moment – we must build on this, invest in it or risk losing it altogether

While there have been lots of very welcome small, short term funds to support activities (and limited support from national Government), these organisations cannot get by on that kind of income indefinitely. The existence of charities is seen by some as a marker of failure: sometimes it is seen as a lack of action by the state or an absence of a market solution. To me it is a sign of progress: that people identify something they want to do and find a way to come together and organise a solution.

There is an important lesson here too: these organisations are part of the resilience of our communities, we need them to be there and never more so than in a crisis.

There is a wonderful lesson to share here: community-led responses can move fast. Very fast. A key enabler was when funders and commissioners gave a very clear message: do what you need to do. That message unleashed creativity and ingenuity of local VCSE organisations to make things happen. It was also an important message of trust, enabling organisations to get on and do their best work and viewing them as partners in the community response rather than suppliers of services.

There is some challenge and learning for VCSE organisations too: the public response to asks for volunteers has been magnificent with more offers of help and support than we could collectively manage. Many volunteers wanted to help not only from a sense of goodwill but because being actively involved brings a sense of purpose at a time of anxiety: to know that you can be useful and you are not powerless. That is something for us to reflect on.



A key enabler was when funders and commissioners gave a very clear message: do what you need to do. That message unleashed creativity and ingenuity of local VCSE organisations to make things happen

“A marathon not a sprint”, “the new normal” and “never waste a crisis” are the other phrases all of us will have heard frequently in recent months as the impact not just of Covid-19 itself but also the social economic impacts of lockdown caused a radical upheaval to life in Manchester’s communities. All of those phrases are about change: they all imply that you are no longer in the same place as where you started. That is an important theme here: this is a time of change and we must keep making progress. For all who have been involved in responding to the crisis, there has been little time to stop and think about the future, about what all this means and where we go next - yet we all have a sense that there is a unique opportunity for positive change. Whether it is the greater awareness of deeply rooted inequality across communities, the increased visibility of the systemic racism in our structures and institutions or just the experience of being able to work more flexibly, our collective sense of what is important has changed and new collaborations have formed.

We should not ignore this. Let’s use this opportunity to gain fresh perspectives and build on what has been created.

We have seen for ourselves the change in air quality and the environment with less traffic on the roads.

We have seen that access to the digital world has to be a utility, the same as access to water, food and housing – it can enable so much more to be done by smart, agile VCSE organisations.



The sector’s resilience has been tested in ways few of us have ever experienced

We have seen a change in working culture where at work we are more visibly human to each other: through those glimpses of our children, our pets and our interesting choices in home décor.

We have seen that there are opportunities for innovation through sharing premises, developing partnerships between funders, building collaborative approaches to information and communications. These will be particularly important in the challenging times ahead.

We have seen what is possible when the social and health needs of communities are seen as more important than short-term economic thinking.

We have seen that our economic and social structures create and increase inequity and there is still much to do: and that there is a huge ecosystem of organisations with insight to share about how we can do better.



Our collective sense of what is important has changed and new collaborations have formed

We have seen Manchester’s marvellously diverse, vibrant, messy, gumption-filled, voluntary, community and social enterprise sector rise to the challenge of the moment – we must build on this, invest in it or risk losing it altogether.

Manchester’s VCSE organisations achieved so much over the last few months. Please take some time to listen to what they have to say.

Introduction

The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector has played a critical role in the response to the Covid-19 crisis. It will continue to play this role as the crisis continues and as we all adapt to the ‘new normal’. What this ‘new normal’ will look like, though, is still in development and there is much to think about if we want it to be better than the old one. It is an opportunity for change but only if we grasp it. This collection of articles is about the experience of organisations and the people they serve during the crisis. There is learning and reflection, and ideas about what the ‘new normal’ should be.

There are 22 short articles in this collection. There could have been many more on an even wider range of subjects and in greater depth. The collection is not truly representative of the VCSE sector as this would be an impossible task. The diversity of the sector is vast (there are over 3,000 VCSE organisations working in Manchester). These articles are just a small sample of the richness of thought and ideas within the sector, from a number of organisations that Macc works with.

For us, the editorial team, one of the joys in preparing this publication was that every article opens a brief window into the world that the contributor and the organisation inhabits, and their expert understanding of that world. Within these pages, for example, you can read about the experience of the Chinese community, the need to listen to survivors of sexual abuse, the limit of digital solutions in mental health services, the history

of supporting people with sight loss in the 1917 flu epidemic and the role of community radio.

There is no meaningful way of summarising what you find in this publication or even ordering it so feel free to begin reading at any article. We have included a by-line for each article to give you some guidance about the content and to help you decide where to start. However, we would encourage you, though perhaps not all at once, to read every article, especially those concerning topics areas you know less about. Every article has something in it that we all need to hear.

Finally, we would like to thank every contributor to this publication for the time spent in writing their article, their patience in the editing process and most of all, for the difference they make as part of the wonderful VCSE sector in Manchester.

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#ExpertsByExperience

#ThisShouldAlwaysBeNormal

“

When we work together we can achieve amazing things. Everyone doing what they can and making a positive difference. This is us at our best

“

We are connecting to the people who live next to us. We are checking they are okay

“

I'm so appreciative of my postie. I think we are all noticing who really drives this country

“

We are finally talking about what makes the compassionate and just society we want to live in



When the Fees Dry Up



**Rethinking the role and funding of
threatened community spaces**

**Adrian Ball, Chief Executive,
Manchester Settlement**



Manchester Settlement is a 125-year-old charity striving to “Create Cycles of Community Change” through the provision of locality focused services in North Manchester.



At Manchester Settlement, from day one of lockdown, our income reduced by over £4k per week as we lost revenue from childcare provision and room rental. Along with all other similar organisations, no stone was left unturned applying for possible alternative sources of assistance: we explored the myriad strands of government funding such as furlough and rates related grants. However, due to the technicalities of the schemes, we have not been able to utilise them as fully as some organisations. Along with other organisations, we struggled with the shifting and contradictory guidance that accompanied the new funding streams – for example, could we furlough staff, as some of our income is from statutory childcare sources? Through the hard work and flexibility of staff and trustees, the charity will ride this storm for as long as there is a place for physical community settings in the world.

There is a great deal of talk about the new normal. Staff and volunteers have worked hard to establish emergency online service provision whilst at the same time wondering what implications digital strategies will have on our service. We already sense that partner organisations are reviewing their use of community buildings, balancing risks to staff and the needs of the community. Partners are not rushing to resume service delivery from community spaces, understandably so – but where does that leave the owners and managers of those community spaces who are trying to hang on until the revenues return?



We already sense that partner organisations are reviewing their use of community buildings, balancing risks to staff and the needs of the community

Not all services can be delivered online – sometimes people need to interact with real people, either emotionally or through their inability to access digital services. If we are to continue running services, in the new Covid-19 compliant mode, they will be different and probably more costly than they were before, thereby reducing further the income-generating potential of community buildings such as ours.

Multi-functional community organisations like Manchester Settlement bring people and organisations together in productive spaces which encourage the cross fertilisation of ideas and support. Commissioners, beneficiaries, service providers, trustees and others come together in a melting-pot of shared ideology, all intent on bringing benefit to the community served by the community building – in our case, the people of Openshaw. Large organisations might rent spaces which mean that rooms can be provided for community groups at a reduced rate, or even free, and fees may be earned from charity shops or other direct sales that enable the delivery of more targeted services. These community hubs are continually recycling local investments, large and small.



Community hubs are continually recycling local investments

“Diversify Income Streams”, “Don’t Rely on Grants”, “Gear Towards Earned Income” – have all been messages that have influenced the management of charities throughout the past decade or longer. The commercialisation of charities to look more and more like social enterprises has seen the development of some very enterprising organisations, of all sizes, increasing the amount of their earned income through infinitely variable and imaginative methods.

At Manchester Settlement, our trustee board has overseen a move to high levels of earned income during the past five years, such that 61% of all income comes from individual transactions with community members or organisations through the purchase of charitable services.

Until very recently, this shift has helped charities like ours to alleviate some of the funding cliff edges that cause small charities to lurch from one funding crisis to another. This shift has enabled better staff retention and organisational development, which allows for greater focus on long-term outcomes for our communities, and greater impacts than individual shorter-term projects.

Having a high proportion of earned income has meant that new sources and types of funding have become available to charities. At Manchester Settlement, for

example, we took advantage of a mixed grant and loan package which, at the time, was a well thought out investment, helping us create a better physical environment for our work with early years children and their families.



Trading income was seen as a buffer against the uncertainty of reliance on grant income and the whims of funders. Perhaps now is a good time to rethink this wisdom and review our relationship with community buildings

Whilst effective governance can ensure that risks are assessed, I’m sure we were not the only charity that assessed the likelihood of such a cataclysmic event as the pandemic as negligible, despite recognising the impact that it would have upon our ability to earn income. Overnight, charities such as ours, that thought they had enhanced their resilience through increasing earned income, found that same resilience corroded, and their ability to fund core operations severely hindered due to their diligence in following what was, at the time, best practice advice.

In the coming months, as different organisations begin to review their operating models, taking opportunities to reduce costs by increasing home working and more online delivery, this is a call to commissioners, service providers and community organisations to take the opportunity for detailed discussion with their stakeholders about the role of community spaces such as ours. The only certainty is that if a shared vision for community buildings is not developed then the opportunities that many organisations currently take advantage of, when seeking to reach into communities, may not be there.

If there is going to be a role for community spaces such as Manchester Settlement in the near and middle future, we need to start planning now for how these spaces can be supported in a world where the potential to generate regular, reliable income from trading activities is going to be limited. Trading income was seen as a buffer against the uncertainty of reliance on grant income and the whims of funders. Perhaps now is a good time to rethink this wisdom and review our relationship with community buildings. For us, it is inconceivable that communities will want to exist without spaces in which they can come together for recreation, education or communication. Do Manchester City Council, local housing associations and health organisations share our vision?

Together Apart – Falling Apart Together?



Working safely online with victims
and perpetrators of domestic abuse

Anna Callaghan,
Director of Services, TLC

TLC (Talk, Listen, Change) supports people to have safe, healthy, happy relationships – both with those around them and themselves, through the delivery of a range of counselling, domestic abuse services and community projects.

As soon as we started to hear about Covid-19 at TLC, the main service we knew it would impact was our domestic abuse work. We specialise in working with perpetrators of abuse – not instead of supporting victims, but as a way of ending the cycle of abuse. When we work with perpetrators, we offer support to partners or ex-partners at the same time and for a period afterwards, because we believe in the crucial value of an integrated approach.

This work is not always well funded, well supported or known about, even in ‘normal’ times. According to Safe Lives data, less than 1% of perpetrators nationally receive any specialised intervention. We knew that a situation where people were stuck in their own homes, living together in potentially abusive, dangerous or toxic relationships had the potential to make the problem much, much worse.

While we are aware that perpetrator work is often very challenging for our staff, the thought of so many members of the community placed at further risk because of lockdown, either through perpetrating or being the victim of abuse, was our motivator to move quickly to take action. For many perpetrators, their weekly interaction with their peers and our group facilitators is their main source of support in managing their own triggers and subsequent behaviour. It is vital in helping people to develop strategies and techniques to use in the longer term.

On the other hand, there was the somewhat intimidating and ever-increasing list of reasons why providing this type of service remotely is usually a bit of a ‘no-go’! It was a scary situation and we spent many meetings and discussions torn between our desperate urge to act immediately and the looming danger and risk if we did the wrong thing and made someone’s situation worse. We continually assessed and re-assessed our decision-making to ensure that at every step we were working towards decreasing risk, and increasing safety of children and partners.

We’re now in a place where we are supporting perpetrators and partners or ex-partners remotely, and as soon as we are able, we’ll move back to face to face delivery. In the meantime, we have drawn up extra contracts with users of our services to ensure both safety and confidentiality in working over the phone or digitally with us.



“Thank you so much for keeping up the appointments by phone. I, and I’m sure everyone else TLC supports, is really appreciative of it. It’s a really nerve-wracking time thinking about self-isolating with an abusive person for the foreseeable future.”

As well as regular conversations with service users, we have set aside specific time to check in with each member of our staff team to ensure they are also feeling supported and comfortable with this new way of working.

We recognise that carrying out this work over the telephone and digitally requires different skills and places different demands on our workers, so we have secured funding to cover the cost of additional clinical supervision and therapeutic support for them.

We have further developed our digital systems to provide online training and ‘how to’ guides for staff. Our CEO has delivered a weekly staff update email, and she is running regular virtual ‘coffee and cake’ sessions open to all staff across the organisation. These are a way of encouraging people to connect in an informal way as we would have done in the kitchen or while making a cup of tea.

Thank goodness we have a great network of colleagues in our sector and beyond, both in Greater Manchester and nationally with whom we were able to connect, share experiences and work alongside to develop a strong joint solution to supporting perpetrators and their families remotely during Covid-19. We’ve always been grateful for those relationships but in this situation, they really came into their own. As a result, we were able, both on a local and a national basis, to push our work up the agenda and advocate for the people we are supporting.



We have a great network of colleagues in our sector and beyond... with whom we were able to connect, share experiences and work alongside to develop a strong joint solution

These are my three key takeaways:

1) We need longer term and more sustainable financial support both for victim AND perpetrator services

We want the increased support and recognition for perpetrator work to continue.

Not historically at the top of the agenda, we believe that if perpetrator behaviour is not addressed at the root cause, alongside support for victims, the abuse will continue. When undertaken properly, this work is not quick or easy.

2) Nothing can replace the deafening silence in a room when a perpetrator - for the first time in their life - has their words or actions challenged by a peer. These face to face moments are often pivotal in behaviour change work, and without them in the longer term, our programmes would be compromised.

Where appropriate, we will continue to offer some remotely delivered services to perpetrators, victims and children. Once our staff learned new techniques and how to talk with each individual in a way that provided them with the mental challenge and connection they needed, it opened our eyes to new ways of delivering our services.



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However – this experience made us realise how much our programme relies on face to face support and challenge. Each session of group work is very experiential - there is lots of peer challenge as well as addressing thoughts, feelings, and the heart behind attitudes rather than just the behaviours themselves. Each session is very much structured around what comes up that day and in that session.

3) Our organisations can be the leaders and the trailblazers

Although there has been much about lockdown and coronavirus that has been hard, upsetting and frustrating, we are glad that we were forced to make the changes we have. We are glad we had to act quickly, to rely on our colleagues to get us through, taking the weight for one another on the scary days and firing through the tasks on the strong days, to forget boundaries and job titles, and just to pull together and get the job done.

We were glad that, in true VCSE sector style, we already had people working from home, in cafes, in libraries and wherever they could find a chair and put a laptop down – because this meant that it was not a big upheaval for those people, and they could support the others for whom it was.

We will continue to work smarter and faster and continue to prepare for more changes which are probably to come. We will continue to develop our already ‘agile’ organisation, challenging ourselves to become more efficient and effective. We have seen how critical our work with perpetrators has been in this crisis and in the future, we are ready to use what we have learnt to provide a truly integrated service.

An Economy that Works for Everyone



Designing, with citizens and communities, an inclusive economy focussed on social and environmental benefit.

**Chris Dabbs, Chief Executive,
Unlimited Potential**



Unlimited Potential is a community benefit society that specialises in social innovation, creating with local people and communities, new solutions to social and economic challenges

Right now, our economy is built around profit rather than enabling everyone to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. We need an inclusive economy that works in the interests of the whole of society and the environment, rather than in the interests of corporate elites.

During the Covid-19 situation, some of the key impacts my organisation has seen include:

- **Digital exclusion - for example, some young people have missed out on education, due to having no access to a computer or sufficient data**
- **Unequal infection and death rates - people living in the most crowded (and often privately rented) households have been at much higher risk of infection**
- **Distinctly different experiences of work - people who continued to work outside home during the 'lockdown' included security guards, taxi drivers, shop workers, bus drivers, cleaners and care workers**
- **Highly variable access to nature - those living in housing without immediate access to gardens or green spaces found it hard to benefit from the cleaner air and more pleasant outdoor environment.**

The Covid-19 situation did not create any of these challenges. It has simply exposed the inequalities between communities that were already there.

Fundamentally, this reflects deep and distinct economic inequalities. The economy of Greater Manchester remains:

- **unequal – fruits of growth going mainly to the wealthiest**
- **insecure – many without secure livelihood and/or dependent on debt**
- **unsustainable – destroying ecological systems on which we depend**



Now is the time to correct past weaknesses and focus on tackling long-term economic inequality

Now is the time to correct past weaknesses and focus on tackling long-term economic inequality through: participation and empowerment of citizens and communities, organising our work and time (paid and unpaid), and sustaining ecological systems.

We know much of what is possible. As well as from its own radical history (especially in the 19th century), Greater Manchester can learn from progressive approaches elsewhere in the world, such as in:

– **Barcelona (Catalunya) – including the Barcelona en Comú citizens platform**

– **Medellín (Colombia) – including the Medellín innovation campaign**

– **Seoul (South Korea) – including the Sharing City Seoul Project**

What this means in practice

Critically, we need greater engagement of and co-design with citizens and communities in economic matters. Once, there was considerable economic ownership and control by citizens and communities (such as through mutual and co-operative structures). Now, almost all economic development is restricted to and held by professionals and agencies.

Economically, we need greater social ownership of wealth, land and assets by communities. This can be done by enabling more local, mutually owned businesses, digital co-operatives, and mutual credit, especially in relation to activities that provide the essential goods and services for everyday life, such as utilities, care, food production, housing and education. These would benefit from new forms of investment, perhaps by regional banks and solidarity funds, as in Germany and France.

Environmentally, a different economy in Greater Manchester would embrace a Green New Deal: a programme to transform the economy and to secure both a fairer society and a safe climate. This means, action to decarbonise the economy that creates well-paid, secure jobs and, to enable greater democratic participation and common ownership of wealth and capital.

Socially, a different economy in Greater Manchester would give much stronger recognition to both social and mission-led businesses (which together already form at least 20% of the economy), and explicit investment in social innovation. There would also be an active programme for digital inclusion.

What is the contribution of the social economy?

The social economy includes a rich diversity of enterprises and organisations whose primary focus is social or environmental, rather than profit for owners or investors. These include social enterprises, co-operatives, mutual, associations and mission-led businesses¹. Together, they can strengthen the local economy and play a key role in the future of Greater Manchester through: leading social innovation, leading on social value, using data and intelligence to lead by example, and leveraging in social investment.

Within ten years, social organisations could:

– **provide many more stable, good quality and ethical jobs and increase local productivity by leveraging non-public funding into services, projects and activities;**

– **enable a greater citizen voice and involvement in decision-making, making the real diversity of views and experiences visible and audible in decision-making at all levels; and**

– **have a key role in protecting and enhancing our planet, the Greater Manchester green and blue space, and the environment around us.**

Meanwhile, community ownership of capital/physical assets can expand to enable communities to have a stake in the running of, for example, housing schemes, community centres, social needs transport, and parks and open spaces.

Conclusion

The economy is a product of design. Every policy and funding decision should lead us to the future we want: a just and compassionate society where every one of us can thrive. As we rebuild, let us redesign our economy and systems so that they work for all of us.

This is a time when change is possible, necessary and desirable to build a more democratic and sustainable economy. It is a moment to reflect on the kind of world we want to build as we move ahead. We have seen that effective government plays a vital role - and also that delayed or uncoordinated action can have grave consequences. We have seen how deeply we all need each other, and how our current set-up fails to meet the needs of too many of us. Any of the possible paths ahead will be difficult. Let us choose one that leads to the future we want.

¹Mission-led businesses are socially-oriented small and medium enterprises (SMES) – that is, SMEs that have social and/or environmental goals, but do not use surplus or profit chiefly to further these goals.

Dumplings of Love: Connected, not Abandoned



The importance of providing love, care and human connection for Chinese communities facing racism

Circle Steele, CEO, Wai Yin



Wai Yin Society is one of the largest BME community centres in the UK, providing a range of employment, education and community services for Chinese men and women and for other ethnic minority groups.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, basic human contact was a lifeline for many elderly and vulnerable Chinese people that the Wai Yin Society supports.

A few weeks ago marked the Dragon Boat Festival, celebrated annually, especially amongst the older members of the Chinese community. They were very excited, some of them waiting for our minibus in their housing complex car park. Others stood outside their own doorways, waving, excited to receive their dumpling and to wish us a "Happy Dragon Boat Festival". We delivered over a hundred dumplings that day. It was a new way for us to celebrate using social distancing measures.

I was so happy to see them all safe and well, especially Ms A, who is 100 years old! As soon as she saw me at the door, she called out, 'Chan Kin Li', which means 'Manager Chan' (my maiden name); she still had her good memory and eyesight! Sadly, one of our volunteers, Ms B, told me that her mother with dementia died recently during lockdown restrictions and she was unable to travel to North East England to visit her. Ms B said, *"My mother was wondering why nobody visited her and so was feeling abandoned and rejected by me; she didn't understand that we couldn't travel long distances during lockdown. So she refused to eat and later died... If it was not for the lockdown, my mum could have lasted a bit longer."*

Whether it was helping the older and most vulnerable people, including those with dementia, to continue their traditional cultural celebrations, or provide the human connection with those feeling lonely and isolated due to 'shielding', or providing comfort and love for those grieving the loss of loved ones during Covid-19 pandemic crisis, it was a privilege to be available to provide support and to be able to understand and meet them at their time of need. This community spirit of love and care deeply touched my heart, and the celebration of a meaningful tradition in Chinese history enabled us to share 'dumplings of love' at a time when love is needed most.

“

This community spirit of love and care deeply touched my heart, and the celebration of a meaningful tradition in Chinese history enabled us to share 'dumplings of love' at a time when love is needed most

Safe from abuse

On the other hand, I have received a number of reports about Chinese people being victims of racist comments as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. One such case was Ms C, a Chinese single mother with young children, who experienced domestic violence and moved out of the family home into separate accommodation during the lockdown. In her new accommodation, she experienced hostility from residents, who called her 'Covid Virus' because she was Chinese. She became extremely anxious about the racist comments and attitude toward her and her children, so much so that she decided to move back to the family home and her ex-husband, despite him being the perpetrator of the domestic abuse that she was attempting to escape. Ms C had to choose between being a victim of domestic abuse or a victim of racial discrimination. In the end, Wai Yin Society was able to support her to move into new accommodation, where she and her young children are safe. Nobody should have to tolerate abuse and during the pandemic - which brought a double impact of abuse in both domestic violence and racism - it is even more vital to ensure safety and peace in every part of society.



Nobody should have to tolerate abuse and during the pandemic... it is even more vital to ensure safety and peace in every part of society

Resilience in jumping over hurdles

My experience tells me to never give up, and to keep running the race right until the end. Paradoxically, challenges, difficulties and rejections provided the additional fuel for my drive and motivation in 'jumping over hurdles', particularly when advocating on behalf of the vulnerable in the Chinese community.

The statutory sector initially refused funding to Wai Yin based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, which did not identify the Chinese community as high priority. This 'cold' statistical data does not reflect the reality of the life of the Chinese community we know. They, alone, are insufficient without the deep understanding of the needs of the Chinese people that comes from the warmth of connection that Wai Yin has.

One of our Wai Yin service users is a cancer patient, whose wife sadly died from cancer during the Covid-19 crisis, and needed bereavement support. Another service user, suffering with anxiety (worsened by the Covid-19 lockdown), was referred to statutory services, but even with an interpreter, she felt that it was not

helping, as it lacked the personal 'warmth' that she would have received in a culturally deeper way through a Chinese-speaking counsellor. These examples show us how much we need our services to be 'culturally competent' to support the most vulnerable people in building resilience at this challenging time.

Whether it is 'dumplings of love', protecting and providing safety from domestic and racial abuse, or building resilience in 'jumping over hurdles' to advocate for the most vulnerable, I am so thankful to each of my dedicated team members during this critical time. We must always remember how life-giving it is to provide the love, care and human connection – not abandonment – so that we can all share with one another the true 'oxygen' we all need during this Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.



We need our services to be 'culturally competent' to support the most vulnerable people in building resilience at this challenging time

Locked down, Locked up and Locked out



**Prisoners in lockdown: supporting
the people who love them**

Diane Curry, CEO, POPS



POPS (Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group) support prison leavers' families in the community, manage a women's service in Oldham and are the provider of prisoner family support for the NW area and parts of Yorkshire

On March 24th 2020, all prisons across the country followed Government guidelines to restrict the movement of anybody but prison staff entering the prison and to restrict prisoner movement within the jail. It was on this day that we realised that the impact of Covid-19 was going to be far reaching. This was uncharted territory. How would this impact upon prisons and prisoners? How would this impact upon POPS, as a charity, as our funding is associated with being available at 11 prison sites across the region? How could we offer support and guidance to the families and friends who visit, when, for the foreseeable future, they could not?

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It was on this day that we realised that the impact of Covid-19 was going to be far reaching... How could we offer support and guidance to the families and friends who visit, when, for the foreseeable future, they could not?

Very quickly, it became apparent that POPS managers had to spend some time thinking about the 'What Now?'. We realised that our staff were anxious, so we reassured them whilst we considered our options. We have been impressed with how quickly and easily our staff have adapted to the changes we have asked of them in difficult circumstances. In addition, our relationship with commissioners has been a major positive during the crisis.

From the beginning of lockdown, HMPPS (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) and other commissioners agreed to pay our funding contracts in full. It was a very welcome approach which enabled us to pay all our staff 100% of their salary, not just the 80% they would receive through the Government furlough scheme. We were honest with commissioners in explaining we could no longer deliver some services. In return, we received an understanding approach which made us feel appreciated. It was recognised that a joint approach, with commissioners and providers working together as partners to ensure the continuation of family services, was essential.

These support services are needed as much during lockdown as after. Commissioners value family services and have been willing to protect them through support and additional resources. They asked for some flexibility in relation to how else we could assist them if we had gaps in our delivery day and we agreed.

We now liaise weekly with HMPPS and our other commissioners to ensure we comply with contractual obligations as much as we are able. We also meet virtually on a regular basis with our peer providers to share matters of concern and good practice. We challenge, we influence and support national and local policy decisions as appropriate, as a collective of family services providers.

The biggest issue we had to face during the 12 weeks of intensive 'lockdown' was trying to address the growing concern of prisoners' families for their loved ones. They were not only **locked up**, and **locked down** but their families were **locked out**. Most of the 83,000 prison population have, to date, spent the bulk of the lockdown period in 23 hour cellular isolation, some alone, and some with a roommate not of their choosing. We all understood the reasoning behind this decision, however as time wore on and the external world eased themselves out of isolation, prisoners were still locked down in a room not much bigger than some people's bathrooms.



Most of the 83,000 prison population have, to date, spent the bulk of the lockdown period in 23 hour cellular isolation, some alone, and some with a roommate not of their choosing

One of the major changes during the crisis has been the Prison Service response to maintaining family relationships during lockdown. It is acknowledged that when prisoner's relationships with family and friends are sustained, their mental health is better and so is their overall behaviour within the prison. Mobile phones, which have never been allowed in British prisons, were already being discussed as a way to enable family relationships to continue. Since late March 2020, prisoners across the UK have been given adapted mobile phones and some prisons have installed in-cell telephones for this purpose. A significant number of UK prisons have introduced video visits, due to face-to-face visits being suspended as part of lockdown procedures. These measures were likely to have been introduced over time but due to the impact of Covid-19 they were fast tracked and bureaucracy put aside in the interest of wellbeing. This has been another positive consequence of the crisis.

As an organisation, we feel we have managed to 'weather' the storm. This does not mean that there are not problems still to be resolved as we push forward. Financially our income generation is reliant on a large retail prison visitor refreshment (cafe) model, which hasn't been able to operate, and which will inevitably affect how we are able to deliver our services in the future. We will have to consider what that means in the longer term. Our financial reserves may have to be used though. I am mindful of the catch-22, that if our reserves fall too low we will not then be able to comply with any financial pre-qualification requirements for new and larger bids, which may restrict us in the future. We are looking into negotiating relief funding from various sources.



The pathway out of lockdown is still not clear but there will most definitely be a new way of doing things in the future

However, this is the third sector. We demonstrate and implement quality business acumen in the delivery of our services, which has stood us in good stead during the Covid-19 crisis. There is an ethos within the third sector that allows for a quicker, more flexible response to crisis; it is what we do, so we are not shaken by the thought.

As with any situation, there will be a time for reflection about what we have learnt during the Covid-19 crisis restrictions, on our liberty, our delivery, our stakeholder relationships and our communication with families. For POPS, this is not for now. What I can share is what we have learnt to date.

We have learnt that our ethos and our organisational value base have proven to be fit for purpose. The pathway out of lockdown is still not clear but there will most definitely be a new way of doing things in the future. Working from home for some staff is cost effective, efficient and reduces travel pressures for staff and travel costs for employers. We are still considering though what we may have lost, if anything, as we have not physically met as a team for months. We have learnt that we are resilient, that our staff work in this sector for purpose and with passion. Good quality working relationships, nurtured over many years with our funders, commissioners, staff, volunteers and families of prisoners has reaped numerous benefits during these difficult times. The next few months will require lots more honest communication. There will be a need for more transparent decision-making, flexibility, supportive but robust challenge and considered concessions. This may be an opportunity to do something differently, not just because we can, but because we should.

The Harmed Must Not Be Hidden



Ensuring that male survivors of sexual abuse and domestic violence are seen and not missed

**Duncan Craig OBE, CEO,
Survivors Manchester**

#UnderstandTheSilence



Survivors Manchester supports male victims/survivors of sexual abuse, rape and sexual exploitation.

Over the past 11 years at Survivors Manchester, we have worked so hard at ensuring we develop and deliver services by, for and alongside male survivors. We have successfully lobbied government to overtly recognise male survivors, resulting in the first ever position statement on male victims and survivors of crimes categorised in the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy. We even helped to shape stories on Coronation Street where characters experienced both male rape and breaking the silence of adult, male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. All of this work has resulted in nearly 700 new referrals being made to our service in the last year.

Reflecting on all of this work, I think we could pretty confidently state that we have broken the silence. We might go as far as to say that us male survivors are now both seen and heard.

If we set this against a city where in January 2020 we were finally told of the guilty verdict on the biggest rape case in British legal history, with all the victims/survivors being male, you could say it had been a busy year for us as an organisation. We had no idea what was on the horizon.

The days leading up to lockdown, we went into crisis management and did everything we could to ensure that we kept services running. We were adapting practically every single day as the information changed and evidence grew, but the whole team were set on the mission not to lose our hard won progress.

When lockdown came about, we had contacted the 180+ men that access our services and identified how we were going to continue providing support. Whether that was by telephone, video conference, text and email, wrongly assuming, of course, that everyone would be able to engage.

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Here I was, faced with the idea that for some of the guys, continuing to access the service we provide would be an impossibility because it simply would not be safe for them to do so

For the first time in a while, I felt my **#BreakTheSilence** bubble begin to burst. Here I was, faced with the idea that for some of the guys, continuing to access the

service we provide would be an impossibility because it simply would not be safe for them to do so. Some might not have a confidential space to talk and others might not have told the people they live with that they get support from us.

I'd spent so much time helping to make noise that I had completely lost sight of the fact that the state of silence isn't always a state people move from, sometimes it is a state people have to move to. Sometimes, noise is only ever temporary.

I needed to listen. As the CEO, as a psychotherapist, and as a survivor. I needed to listen to the silence and understand it better. So, what did I hear?

I heard that for some, a temporary silence is about digital poverty. Yes, whilst most people may have mobile phones, not everyone has a smartphone, tablet or computer to video call from and not everyone has the data to be able to Zoom.

I heard that for some, their housing situation meant that there isn't a room where they can go and talk freely and in confidence, without the fear of being overheard.

I heard that for others, the housemates or family they live with don't even know they access Survivors Manchester for support because in them knowing, the survivor has to 'come out' and reveal something so both deeply personal and deeply traumatic.



That the state of silence isn't always a state people move from, sometimes it is a state people have to move to

I heard that for a small group of men, the person they live with is the abuser and so it's far from safe for them to speak at the moment.

So much of the spotlight has featured some amazing, timely and welcomed responses to 'hidden harm'. On multiple occasions on social media, I had seen colleagues from the VCSE sector, health and care share the fact that women fleeing domestic violence do not need to worry about the lockdown and they absolutely should feel able to get to a safe place. I saw messaging about free train travel for women to get to a safe place on the news and even Boots the chemist had been set up as a safe haven.

Contrary to popular belief, all of these amazing initiatives are open to male, female and trans victims and survivors. Never once did I see the same messages directed to male victims. I would be interested to hear just how many men saw those messages and realised the same support was on offer for them? How many have been harmed and how many are in hiding?



I am asking everyone to help me build a different, wider view that ensures male victims and survivors are seen and not missed

As we begin to lift the lockdown, as we move into a new way of living with Covid-19 and as we begin to rebuild our spaces, I am asking everyone to help me build a different, wider view that ensures male victims and survivors are seen and not missed.

I got distracted by the noise we were creating and forgot that the movement between silence and noise isn't forward and linear. I cannot do that again because male victims and survivors deserve better.

So I am sending out an open invitation to anyone that wants to join me in climbing a learning curve to understand silence even better than before and develop new solutions to tackle this age old problem.

#UnderstandTheSilence

Britain's Best Kept Secret



The importance of community radio during a pandemic

Ed Connole, Director, ALL FM

ALL FM 96.9 uses radio to improve the lives of the people of Greater Manchester, highlighting events, issues and the voice of Manchester communities.

When lockdown commenced, I, like the rest of the world, wasn't sure what to expect. I wasn't sure how a community radio station broadcasts during a lockdown. What are we supposed to do at this time? There is no handbook regarding broadcasting during a pandemic (yet).

My first and best decision was to consult with staff and volunteers; what was feasible and what did we want to do? ALL FM had a choice; to furlough the staff and cease broadcasting or to 'keep calm and carry on'. I believe that in the midst of a pandemic, a community radio station needs to support its community so 'keeping calm and carrying on' it was then.

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There is no handbook regarding broadcasting during a pandemic

There are over one hundred volunteers broadcasting a diverse range of shows on ALL FM 96.9. Many have support needs. All are passionate, dedicated and talented radio producers and presenters. Our ethos is 'for the community, by the community'. I thought our plans were ambitious but the voluntary sector, in my experience, achieves so much with limited resources. I like ambitious.

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We pre-recorded shows from home and broadcast 70% of our schedule

What was I worried about? ALL FM would stop broadcasting. ALL FM would become irrelevant. Society would breakdown and a dystopian world would manifest itself in the North West. This hasn't happened (yet). What I did find was that our volunteers accepted change, our audience accepted change and that people wanted to help each other. We pre-recorded shows from home and broadcast 70% of our schedule. Radio training moved from the studio to Zoom. A new normal.



We had just hired a salesperson to sell radio training as part of our diversifying income strategy. Covid-19 arrived at a particularly inconvenient time for us. The salesperson became the 'Covid-19 Community Response Coordinator'. I believed that he could help spread the word regarding what people and organisations were doing in our communities and that our role was to promote, encourage and inform. We wanted to tell people what was going on and where to access help. It was on the job learning for me. I started to understand what a community radio station should do during a pandemic.



In the first six weeks alone, we spoke to nearly 60 organisations across a range of issues; from foodbanks to domestic violence, promoting their work and informing communities how to gain access to these services

Our shows promoted initiatives in a range of languages. The Daily Lockdown Bulletin show was aimed at people who may not have access to the internet. In the first six weeks alone, we spoke to nearly 60 organisations across a range of issues; from foodbanks to domestic violence, promoting their work and informing communities how to gain access to these services: I had been worried that we wouldn't have enough content for a daily show. So many people and organisations were helping and I felt blessed that we could help shine a light on this.

ALL FM was acting from its own initiative. There appeared to be no national strategic role for community radio stations in this pandemic. There are over two hundred community radio stations in the UK and many work with the more isolated in our communities. Community radio stations, such as ALL FM, are in a unique position to communicate on an ultra local basis, to reach out to those who are most at risk. This is partly because some of those who are most at risk are already involved with their local stations.

One of my favourite aspects of being involved at ALL FM is that we are accessible. The process of accessing commercial or public radio can be daunting to someone who has never issued a press release or called a news desk. The process of accessing community radio is far less so because the person answering the phone or the email is someone who lives in the same community. The people presenting and producing the shows often live in the same street.



Throughout the UK, so many towns and villages are served by a community radio station, providing a voice for those whose voices are least heard

I often feel that community radio is Britain's best kept secret. Throughout the UK, so many towns and villages are served by a community radio station, providing a voice for those whose voices are least heard. In Greater Manchester, there are eleven community radio stations, serving a diverse range of communities. In a pandemic, it has been shown that the more vulnerable are at greatest risk. Community radio has experience in engaging and talking to the more vulnerable in our communities.

As part of a communication strategy, community radio alone can't tick all the boxes but it can communicate with a diverse range of people. We train people so they can reach out and speak for and to their communities. At ALL FM, we have the only Chinese language radio show in Manchester. We have a Spanish language radio show. We have shows in Farsi, in Urdu, in Polish. There's a show aimed at the Irish community. Shows aimed at older people. We are already in conversation with those communities that national or local government may struggle to connect with.

We were told at the beginning of the lockdown; 'we're all in this together'. That statement implies inclusion, it implies equality. If we are 'all in this together', community radio stations can help those who are excluded become included. This shouldn't be forgotten post-Covid either, when perhaps the need for support will be greater but less visible. This may be when ALL FM's faces its greatest challenge - survival.

@TruthPoverty

#ExpertsByExperience

#ThisShouldAlwaysBeNormal

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There is suddenly loads of training available. This is brilliant and I am going to do so many courses

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In a just society, all children would have access to a decent education. It is suddenly crystal clear that children's education is massively impacted by the resources they have at home and that this is something we need to act on

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Inequalities have been completely revealed. This is in the centre of the discussion

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We are sharing what we have



Power of Belonging



Shifting the focus of mental health investment to people, connection and kindness

Elizabeth Simpson, CEO,
Manchester Mind



Manchester Mind's purpose is to support better mental health for everyone through delivering a wide range of services including support, advice, information and training.

26th February 2020 was my last 'normal' working day. I was sitting in a meeting when we heard about a children's centre which had been locked down. The reality of what was to come dawned. The next month passed in a flurry of risk assessments, continuity plans and IT equipment purchases. This was followed by extensive conversations on how staff can safely deliver services from home whilst ensuring they remained accessible for the people that needed them.

However, as we talked more, we realised that we wouldn't be able to meet everyone's needs and this continues to be a concern. My last day in the office was 23rd March. We went in to gather up equipment, folders and of course the plants – mustn't forget the plants.

On that day, one of our volunteers came into the building angry and confused, frightened and inconsolable; they had just been through a detox and had come out to find all support gone. No groups, no clear information about how ongoing support would be provided, even the volunteering opportunity, which had done much to occupy their time, had also been pulled away. They knew maintaining abstinence would be an impossibility and subsequently their mental health would deteriorate. Unfortunately, they were right on both counts. For me, it was a clear and stark reminder about how devastating this was likely to be for many people.

We had no choice over the changes that we needed to make, and while there have been positives, we know that these changes have not been helpful to some of the people we have been working with. At times, change can happen slowly and allow for adjustments. This has not been possible with our response to Covid-19. Through necessity, it was rapid, and adjustments were made quickly by staff and also, in some ways, by the people who needed our support.



Creating a sense of belonging, so people felt safe to contribute and build relationships, has always been a focus for us at Manchester Mind

Some of those changes have been positive and long-lasting, and will enhance what we do and the way that we do it. We have learned a lot. Creating a sense of belonging, so people felt safe to contribute and build relationships, has always been a focus for us at Manchester Mind. We had always felt that we needed to be 'open' and that all our services must be face-to-face, we couldn't possibly do the same quality of work by phone or other remote options. We were wrong. It can and it has been done. Yet, we have to remember that this way of delivering our services is not for everyone. The digital sphere is not a panacea and we need to be careful going forward that it remains an add-on, not a replacement for our face-to-face services.

Offering our services digitally has definitely improved our reach and accessibility across the city, but we know that there are people we are missing. This is partly because of the well documented difficulty with digital accessibility, but there is more to it than that. It can provide a real barrier for the conversations we need to have. Going forward, there is more work to do to understand how we can manage this gap.

What does the pandemic mean for our mental health generally and for how services can be configured for the future? It is certainly not enough to aim for recovery when we were already behind and the need will be greater. This pandemic now has to be the catalyst to 'build back better'. The narrative around mental health provision has to change. It has to be about acknowledging that the medical model alone doesn't work for most people. Mental health problems are more predominant in areas where there are higher levels of deprivation and social isolation and disconnection from communities. We cannot continue to ignore this socio-political context. Covid-19 has shone an even brighter light on these entrenched inequalities. We must acknowledge that these inequalities can contribute to poor mental health, and that tackling them should be part of an overall strategy for improving individual and community mental health.

Mental health service provision has to be about the whole person. Firstly, in terms of services, the emphasis should be on ensuring that lived experience is a meaningful part of designing, commissioning and evaluating services. Secondly, statutory and voluntary sector services need to better work together and build connections to provide a more systematic and complementary offer. Yes, this already happens in parts, sometimes planned, sometimes more to do with local and grassroots relationships. If all services were commissioned in a way that looks to wider outcomes and that take into account the needs of the whole person – how much more effective would that be? It is not all about funding, although some of it is, it is more about commissioning services in connection with what else is there, how services can connect with one another and the expectation that they will.

Medication and therapeutic interventions will work for some people by themselves but if a person's environment is one where they are lonely and isolated, or their housing is poor or fragile or even none existent, or there are excruciating choices to be made on a daily basis due to lack of money or debt, or if people are faced with stigma – then those medical interventions will be less effective.

We need to shift the focus of mental health investment to communities, to prevention and early intervention. This has been on the agenda for years, but now is the time to see it happen. If this pandemic leads to systematic changes in provision, it needs to be about this. The VCSE must be an important part of the solution.

There is nothing here that hasn't been spoken about, maybe even planned for. The clear focus on inequality and health makes a new way forward essential and inevitable. The VCSE always has been a vital contributor and will often be the first port of call for people who experience the social impacts of poor mental health, but I am not sure it has always been acknowledged as an essential part of wider service provision, and it needs to be.

The devastating loss of life, impact of lockdown and the inevitable recession will have deep and lasting consequences on all our lives. It is expected that there will be a surge in mental health need across the population and that need will predominately fall between primary and secondary care. It's not a new gap, but may become greater if it is not addressed. Some of what people will be feeling due to the experiences of this pandemic will be natural distress and it is important that we do not rush to medicalise it. That isn't to ignore what people are dealing with, but to provide accessible and non-medical community based services.

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We need to build a world where we recognise the power of belonging and the positive impact it can have on a person's mental health

We need to build a world where we recognise the power of belonging and the positive impact it can have on a person's mental health, wellbeing and ability to cope. We all have a part to play in making the necessary large-scale changes that Covid-19 has made even more necessary. We have to build services which support connections into communities and connections between organisations, and focus on building kind relationships. We cannot go back to the same frustrations as before. The stakes are higher now. Everyone deserves to be supported in their mental health needs, and we all have a part to play in building that future. This should be the new normal.

Let's Ditch the Good Old Days



Deepened partnerships,
strengthened communities and a
better way of commissioning

Fay Selvan, CEO, Big Life Group



The Big Life group was established in 2002. The group operates across the north of England and includes well-known brands such as Big Issue North. Big Life is in the business of changing lives for people who have the least.

I was listening to a podcast the other day about a US Government department in the 1950's whose job was to decide what to save for posterity after a nuclear apocalypse. It brought back many memories of diving under my school desk as part of a nuclear attack drill - it's my excuse for never learning my times tables. Then, the podcasters asked what Americans of today would preserve. One of the most thought provoking answers was from someone of Native American heritage who said that he wouldn't save anything. Instead, he extolled the benefits of an oral history that adapts and changes with the times, because it doesn't trap people in the attitudes of the past.



This is a real opportunity for us to create
a better world than we had before

How great would it be if, following this period, we could ditch the old attitudes and beliefs that keep us returning to doing things the same old way. This is a real opportunity for us to create a better world than we had before.

Covid-19 has shone a light on the big injustices in our society: How unequal our society is; how reliant we are on some of the people society values the least; and how important our public services are. It has also revealed our superpowers. Overnight we cut carbon emissions, found rough sleepers somewhere to live and built huge 'Nightingale' hospitals – things that we thought would take us years to achieve. Along with The Black Lives Matter protests over recent weeks, it has given me hope that we can tackle the injustices and inequality in our society by making positive choices that make a real difference.

Big Life have been forced into new ways of working. I have been amazed at how quickly we have got things done. Our staff seem energised and empowered to reach out and make new partnerships, and find new ways to do things. In Tameside, we set up a mental health helpline in under a week, redirecting Peer Support staff from face to face to telephone support. In Rochdale we seconded staff to local authority Covid-19 hubs, provided staff at testing centres to reassure people attending, and moved all our mental health services to telephone or video appointments.

We expanded our online 'Learn Well' training which offers a range of courses to enhance wellbeing, and developed a new bereavement course which specifically responded to trauma caused by Covid-19 related deaths.

Hundreds of our staff moved to making welfare calls. Our 56 Be Well staff in Manchester made over 3,900 calls to 1,900 people during the three months of lockdown, offering support on welfare benefits, wellbeing, and access to foodbanks. The Living Well team in Rochdale made 2,016 phone calls and 61 WhatsApp video appointments, offering support with smoking, oral health, low mood, isolation and general wellbeing to 779 people. One woman who had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and had recently quit smoking was really struggling with cravings to smoke when lockdown started, but due to regular calls from her key worker, she has now maintained six months smoke free. She said "I'm on oxygen, but goodness only knows what I would have been like if I started smoking again. Probably not on this earth, but under it." Living Well staff also supported people through Zoom groups including Arabic women's, carers, fibromyalgia and men's group. As one housing provider put it, "your chatter helpline has become a real lifeline to some of our tenants".



Covid-19 has shone a light on the big injustices in our society: How unequal our society is; how reliant we are on some of the people society values the least; and how important our public services are

Our centres staff who could no longer offer drop-in groups and face to face support started co-ordinating local volunteers to help out at food banks and undertake deliveries to people shielding. In Hulme and Moss Side, we supported people with a range of challenges, including people who had been furloughed and had reductions in income, people who weren't eligible for Universal Credit or Covid-19 support, single people with mental health and addictions, and people with long term health conditions who were shielding. 15 volunteers delivered 490 food parcels and 360 hot meals prepared by local church volunteers. One asylum seeker with underlying health conditions who was shielding, said "My friend has just seen me for the first time in three months and he can't believe how healthy I look. It's the first time since I came to this country that I have not been hungry".

Our schools (Unity and Longsight) and family services moved to telephone and online support during lockdown. The biggest challenge was for families without any internet or devices for children to access online learning and over 100 home learning and resource packs were delivered by staff. All teaching staff kept in regular touch with children through Class Dojo or telephone calls. We kept one Children's Centre open for essential midwifery services, using it as a base for parents to collect more resources and food vouchers.



We do not need to return to an outdated version of all public services which are centrally commissioned, highly specified and delivered by large nationally accountable monoliths

Public sector commissioners have embraced their roles of facilitators and enablers, rather than contract managers. They came to us with problems and we went back to them with solutions. Working as a team of voluntary, community and public services with a common aim, we were able to be creative and agile. We need to keep this agility, strengthen self-managing teams and embed professional autonomy and accountability across the spectrum of public service. We do not need to return to an outdated version of all public services which are centrally commissioned, highly specified and delivered by large nationally accountable monoliths.

Covid-19 has deepened partnerships and strengthened communities. A lot of the support for vulnerable people has been delivered by community generated, bottom up initiatives; communities coming together, partnering with private businesses, community organisations and the voluntary sector, to help themselves. When the Big Issue North had to stop selling on the streets, we raised £70k from public donations to support our 230 vendors who suddenly, overnight, had no income. We reached out on social media and got supermarkets to stock our magazines, and we got PPE when it was nowhere to be found. One vendor said he became "aware that the staff might be able to help in these difficult times, so I rang up the office. They've helped me massively. I've received two vouchers and a hardship payment. The support I've had from the office has just been really helpful".

However, whatever opportunities Covid-19 may provide for radical change in the future, it's important to acknowledge how devastating it has been too. Let's face it, it's been really tough and it's going to get tougher. Along with many personal tragedies in our communities

and families, Big Life lost a valued volunteer to Covid-19 and a member of staff took his own life. We have had to strip our budgets and take advantage of government furlough and rate relief to help manage the losses from our nurseries and the Big Issue North. I am worried about central government trying to recover the national debt by embarking on more public sector austerity in the years ahead.



I'm also very, very, hopeful that we can have a better, fairer 'new normal' in the future

We have started a consultation with staff about how, where and when they want to work in the future. Many staff don't want to return to their old patterns of work, but continue the positive aspects of lock down – more time with their families and at home in their neighbourhoods. One of the other things I would like to keep in our new normal is our deepened relationships with each other. We have peered into each other's homes over Zoom. We have met each other's children and pets. We are no longer one dimensional people – identified by our roles – at work Chief Exec – at home mother. At work and at home, I am now the Chief Exec, post lady on a bike, bin woman, 'easy' yoga lover, foodbank volunteer, gardener, book lover, and part of my local neighbourhood. I'm also very, very, hopeful that we can have a better, fairer 'new normal' in the future.

From fear to a collective response



Challenging the racist structures in health, criminal justice, education, housing and employment

Faye Bruce, Chairperson & Charles Kwaku-Odoi, Chief Officer, CAHN

CAHN (Caribbean & African Health Network) is focused on reducing health inequalities in a generation for Caribbean and African people by influencing policy and practice.

Following the announcement of the Covid-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories started to gain traction on social media platforms globally, stating that the Black Caribbean and African people could not contract Covid-19. Shortly afterwards, celebrities Idris Elba and Chelsea footballer Hudson-Odoi (both Black men) announced that they had contracted the virus and were recovering. Since then, there has been a huge shift in attitude that recognises the vulnerability of Caribbean and African people. Prior to the release of national statistics which revealed the disproportionate mortality from Covid-19, CAHN had already started to share messaging across Black community platforms to warn Black Caribbean and African people of the risks due to underlying health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart-related complaints.

We have witnessed many reactions from the heart of the Black community when it became apparent that Black people were dying from Covid-19 in higher numbers than other population groups, ranging from ignorance or lack of knowledge to vigilance and caution. The community began sharing remedies they believed could simply kill the virus such as heating houses to a temperature above that of the virus. There was misinformation across community social media platforms stating that the virus was created by the 5G mobile network and the 5G infrastructure towers and staff installing cabling became a target.

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Whilst all the misinformation was being shared in the first few weeks of the pandemic, our role was to bring some leadership and support to the community

Whilst all the misinformation was being shared in the first few weeks of the pandemic, our role was to bring some leadership and support to the community. We needed to provide evidence-based information that could calm some of the fears and anxieties around the virus. CAHN quickly used our networks of Black professionals to develop information videos to debunk the myths and ensure that the community had the information needed to avoid transmission. With a steer



from our chairperson, a call was put out for a collective community response meeting that would bring the community together to identify ways in which we could communicate and respond to the challenge of Covid-19.

So much has changed since we had the first meeting on 17th April which was also the start of our Covid-19 survey. This collected 334 responses over a three week period from the Caribbean and African community in Greater Manchester that were analysed and published in a report ([A PICTURE OF INEQUALITY: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Caribbean & African Community in Greater Manchester](#)). We reported on common barriers to social distancing which meant that members of our community were spending significant amounts of time out of their homes. This was largely due to frontline work and supporting families who were shielding.

Over a period of time, there has been an increased demand for traditional ethnic food which was not an offer by the Food banks, so CAHN raised this as an issue that needed to be resolved. We were delighted that the system listened and responded accordingly. However, we need this inclusivity and recognition of diversity to be common practice across Greater Manchester over the long term. We have seen a real difference in the way our community has united throughout the time of the COVID-19 crisis. This coming together was evident in the report where 74% of people wanted care delivered by Black-led organisations.



We have seen fear turn to a collective approach where the community is determined to challenge the structures that have allowed the system to treat Black people in ways that disadvantages them

Through this first phase, we have seen fear turn to a collective approach where the community is determined to challenge the structures that have allowed the system to treat Black people in ways that disadvantages them. The racial disparities are so stark that Black people have more than four times the risk of dying from Covid-19 and almost twice the risk when socio-economic factors are taken into account.

Of the £6 billion for devolution in Greater Manchester, the Black community has not had its slice of the cake. If the Black community receive resources, they are often crumbs which do not allow us to address such stark and urgent challenges in a sustainable way and this has to stop.



We have dealt with a barrage of complaints about treatment of Black staff and patients. For example... Black staff having to work predominantly on Covid-19 wards

Throughout this pandemic, we have community statements about the poor treatment they have received which has resulted in disengagement with mainstream services. This has been attributed to the lack of trust based on experience or a perceived view of how they will be treated should they access services. We have dealt with a barrage of complaints about treatment of Black staff and patients. For example, we became aware of bullying of Black staff having to work predominantly on COVID-19 wards which continually exposed them to more risk. Alongside this, we became aware of preferential access to face masks for white majority populations which left Black people, especially bank and agency staff, in many cases, with no choice but to use what was available or risk losing out on work and an income.

On top of all of this, the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement has further exacerbated the cry for change and the need to hold the system to account for the racial injustice facing the Black community.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the pandemic is how the virus has intensified enduring and deep-seated inequalities in the Black community and how structural bias results in the health inequalities we see most evidently displayed through Covid-19.

CAHN wants to see the spotlight remaining on marginalised communities to uncover the way in which the legacy of racism has continued to disable the Black community. We want to build upon the report recommendation, which highlighted the need for true diverse representation on boards. We want to be represented on boards and reflected in policies and practices as Black people in proportion to our population.

We want to see the end of the administrative label of BAME being applied to our community and instead we want systems to recognise that we are a heterogeneous community of people with different challenges. The Black community in Greater Manchester is ready for a movement that changes the way that the system currently operates and keeps Black people marginalised and treated unfairly across institutions. We need tailored health and wellbeing messages that speak directly to our community so that Black people are empowered to act in ways that improve our life chances. We also need the system to understand the barriers that the Black community face and to respond in ways that improve outcomes across all areas of public life.



The Black community in Greater Manchester is ready for a movement that changes the way that the system currently operates and keeps Black people marginalised and treated unfairly across institutions

It appears that finally the eyes of the world are on the racist structures facing the Black community across health, criminal justice, education, housing and employment and there is some movement to address what we have been campaigning and lobbying for over the last decade and more. This will require organisations like CAHN, along with those from outside the Black community that want to see change (we call these our allies), to ensure that these issues are always on the table, and to hold the systems to account for the implementation of the report findings on addressing racial inequalities

We should be on decision making boards shaping the policies and practices as people with that lived experience. The opportunities that the Covid-19 pandemic has presented has brought sections of the Black community together to identify ways in which the community can respond to the challenge. Some of this has required meeting internally as a community, as well as bringing decision makers to the community to respond to questions regarding how trust can be built with health care service providers, the police, the council and others. We need this to continue. The Black community have not seen the level of investment needed that is proportionate to need. If we get the representation right at decision making levels with the mandate to dismantle the existing structures that exist within our institutions, then this will serve as a step change towards reducing the racial inequalities that we see.

Retracing our Past



**Domestic violence and abuse services:
taking time to understand, heal and
pay attention to what matters**

Gail Heath, CEO, Pankhurst Trust



**PANKHURST
TRUST**

The Pankhurst Trust, which incorporates Manchester Women's Aid, was formed in 2014. The Pankhurst Trust, which ran the iconic Pankhurst Centre with its museum and women-only activity space, merged with Manchester Women's Aid, which is Manchester's largest specialist provider of domestic abuse services.

As I write this article, the words 'no going back' echo around my head. You see, as CEO of The Pankhurst Trust, birthplace of the Suffragette Movement and home to MWA Domestic Abuse Services, I am partial to bold statements and good intentions. Why not leave the past behind and focus on our strengths? What is stopping us from 'building back better'? How thrilling, how exciting to be at the start of something new and perhaps even, to coin yet another phrase, be part of a revolution.

Yet, I find it difficult to resist providing an analysis of the catastrophe that we have collectively lived through. I feel compelled to go back and recount step-by-step the events and actions taken by others and myself during this extraordinary time. My experience of this life-changing pandemic is so rich, immediate and compelling, the desire to share it and seek the validation of others who have lived through it, is simply overwhelming.

However, this 'embodied lived experience' grounded as it is in physical sensation, images, thoughts and feelings is not what is asked of me here. Right now, I am to be a narrator, a reflector, uncovering and sharing the impact of Covid-19 on Manchester Women's Aid and other domestic abuse organisations, with the aim that we might all move swiftly forward to a brighter and better future.

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We must be given time to develop the self-awareness gained through reflection if we are to bring about real and lasting societal change

This is the first thing I would change and so my first ask is for time. We must be given time to develop the self-awareness gained through reflection if we are to bring about real and lasting societal change. At a time when there is an international upsurge in calls for Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to address centuries of harm caused by systemic racism, we are being hurtled towards 'recovery' without time to heal and understand the lasting impact of this potential extinction event.

The need to connect with and understand our lived experience is not something 'new' but a known therapeutic approach across the domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault sector. We need to understand the depth and impact this virus has had on our work, our lives, our physical and emotional health, our individual and collective psyche before we can begin to consider an alternative fairer, safer future.

We need to ask more fundamental questions of ourselves and our communities of interest before laying new foundations. For example; how best to come to terms with the speed and ease which our basic rights to travel, to visit family, to flee violence and even to carry out our life and death rituals were removed to protect our lives? What to do with the rolling back of these measures as economic stability reclaims its priority over wellbeing? What of the surfacing fear that this power over our lives might be used to constrain individuals and activism in this new hyper connected world?



We humans depend utterly on nature and community for our survival

As an idealist at heart but realist by nature I know it is unlikely that humanity will allow itself this time to heal so my next ask is that we continue to pay attention. This virus has insinuated itself into our way of life and has laid bare to us what matters most. Never have we been more aware of the importance of connecting with family, friends and communities as well as the importance of safe, healthy and nurturing homes and environments for everyone, and not just the privileged few. It has forced us to come to terms with the fact that we humans depend utterly on nature and community for our survival and to acknowledge that so many of our actions abuse these relationships.

As I stand and survey our Pankhurst Trust Covid-19 raft, built by many hands with loving care, I cannot help but feel wonder and pride at the professionalism and commitment of our staff, volunteers and clients at a time when their own worlds and families have been turned upside down. Whether we are assisting families to flee domestic abuse by increasing access to and expanding the number of safe refuge spaces (spaces that have over time, been eroded and lost in our pursuit of savings and profit) or providing a lifeline for survivors, isolated and vulnerable but never alone due to our community outreach services. Our experiences have been underpinned and informed by the activism of our feminist forebears.



The sheer exhilaration of breaking through the artificial boundaries created by organisations, commissioners and funders to directly meet the need has acted as a stimulant for organic ground up recovery

The sheer exhilaration of breaking through the artificial boundaries created by organisations, commissioners and funders to directly meet the need has acted as a stimulant for organic ground up recovery. The forging of new and the strengthening of existing local supply chains and support networks simply 'to get things done' has invigorated those organisations and triggered new ways of achieving change through deeds not words. Going back is proving to be an essential part of our journey forward.

So let us take time to understand, to heal and pay attention to what matters. Let us be proud when we look back in years to come at these tumultuous times that we stood together with all of humanity, if just for a moment and built back better.

We did it before with Spanish Flu



Supporting blind and partially sighted people through two world wars and two deadly global pandemics

Helen Doyle, Evidence and Impact Analyst and Robert Cooper, Director of Community Services

Henshaws are one of the oldest charities in Greater Manchester opening the doors of our 'Blind Asylum' in 1837. In our time, supporting blind and partially sighted people across our region we have survived two world wars and two deadly global pandemics, the Spanish Flu in 1918 and now Covid-19 in 2020.

We feel our history keenly at Henshaws and we knew we could continue to support our community through this challenging time, as we have done during previous emergencies. Reports to our trustee board in 1918 and most recently in 2020 demonstrate our unwavering commitment to support those we work with in the most challenging of circumstances.

MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT, 1918-19.

To the Board of Management,
Henshaw's Blind Asylum, Old Trafford.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have pleasure in reporting that the health of the inmates in the various establishments has been good during the year. The Epidemic of Influenza invaded the Institution on two occasions, viz., in July last year and in the early spring of this. The former affected more of the inmates than the latter, and unfortunately one died from Pneumonia and Toxiffimia. Except for the two epidemics there has been nothing exceptional to note.

Yours faithfully, J. W. STENHOUSE,
Medical Officer.

(79th Annual Report of Henshaws Blind Asylum
1919)

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, MAY 2020

I have the pleasure in reporting we have reached out to 4015 residents across Greater Manchester, supporting a total of 2598 people. Almost 200 CYP and Families were contacted and provided with resources to support them and their families. 1267 calls were made by our digital team to support people with their technology needs helping them stay connected. I can report that our community have been extremely appreciative of our efforts and grateful that during the Covid-19 pandemic someone was ensuring they had appropriate supplies and access to information, advice, guidance and support.

The measures that the UK Government took to address Covid-19, including restrictions on movement and social distancing, were absolutely necessary to save lives. However, the restrictions on all of us have other consequences and implications, particularly so for people already facing challenges in their everyday lives through sight loss.

We realised that our service users were going to be particularly vulnerable in lockdown as many are older, live alone and have other health conditions and disabilities. We produced lists of all our service users sorted by area, and then prioritised by age, whether they lived alone, and had other medical conditions. Our staff then pro-actively called our service users to assess their welfare needs using a red-amber-green (RAG) system to determine their vulnerability and inform our actions. In total we made just over 4000 calls to the most vulnerable people we know.



The changes required by all of us have other consequences and implications, particularly so for people already facing challenges in their everyday lives through sight loss

As lockdown continued, we supported people to get connected with digital technology to reduce isolation, as well as to access counselling and befriending services. Knowledge Village, our online support service, has been helping people through videos, eBooks and blogs covering various topics including: how to socially distance; how to support visually impaired children with learning at home; and how to look after your mental health.

During our outreach service, from week 1 to week 11 of lockdown, we carried out a survey with 955 people. This identified how the crisis affected people with sight loss in particular ways, and highlighted the following key issues:

– **The overwhelming majority of our respondents were not contacted by their local authority sensory team during the early stages of the pandemic.**

– **41% of the people we spoke to did not receive any of the public health messaging about coronavirus/ Covid-19 in a format which was accessible to them.**

– **One quarter of respondents were informed they were at very high risk from Covid-19 (extremely vulnerable and should be shielding).**

– **There was considerable variation across Greater Manchester with regard to the support people with sight loss received during this time.**

What does the future hold for the sight loss community?

Before the pandemic broke, we were acutely aware of fractures in the adult sight loss pathway, particularly the transition from hospital eye health services to social care and rehabilitation. A critical part of the sight loss pathway is the management of the Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) process and the conversion of CVIs into people being registered on the Blind and Partially Sighted Registers (a statutory duty of each local authority). We understand the challenges involved with managing the Registers, however, Covid-19 has made existing disparities even starker. If such processes were effectively managed we believe there could have been a different outcome to the experiences reported within our survey.

We have an opportunity to learn from this experience to ensure that, both people with newly diagnosed sight loss and those people who have been living with vision impairment for some time, are able to fully contribute and live in society and that nobody is left without support. Society presents huge barriers to people with sight loss due to the planning of our external environment which frequently does not take into

account the needs of people with sight loss. Due to the myriad of social distancing measures now referred to as the 'new norm', our community will now have to reprocess and relearn navigation and mobility skills. Potentially, over two million blind and partially sighted people across the country will require their own specific road map back to independence, involving re-enablement provision and significant support around the psychological challenges this will present.



Our community will now have to reprocess and relearn navigation and mobility skills due to the myriad of social distancing measures now referred to as the 'new norm'

In Greater Manchester, in the first 10 weeks of the crisis, it is estimated that approximately 127,280 eye tests and up to 72,920 eye clinic outpatient appointments have been cancelled. There would under normal circumstances have been 667 people newly registered across the North West in this 10-week period. What has happened to these people during this time? Why did key public health organisations fail to harness the Register of Blind and Partially Sighted people to ensure that key health messages were communicated appropriately to this community? Why did it take some local authorities up to 11 weeks to communicate important messages to the registered population? Were blind and partially sighted people marginalised by authorities? Were they one of the forgotten communities?

This is not an exhaustive list of the questions that Henshaws, alongside the blind and partially sighted community, are asking. We want answers, and we are promoting discussion across health and social care organisations, which we are hoping will lead to real and sustained change in the way that services for blind and partially sighted people are managed in the future.

We are proud of the way we have been able to respond to this crisis and believe that without the support of the third sector, blind and partially sighted people in our community could have fared much worse. We responded in the only way we know - as the agile and responsive partner to our health and social care organisations - we mobilised our staff and volunteers and ensured the people we know and support were not forgotten in their hour of need as indeed we did in 1918.

@TruthPoverty

#ExpertsByExperience

#ThisShouldAlwaysBeNormal

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Helping people depends upon trust, having a relationship. This needs to exist before a crisis happens



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Having the internet at home has a massive impact on a child's education. We are recognising that many children don't have this and want to do something about this

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Working in a crisis is exhausting. We were all running on adrenaline and now we realise this isn't sustainable

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We are understanding the impact of mental health on people's lives

They Beat Us To It!



Strength, creativity and gift in a time of risk

**Helen Gatenby, Manager,
M13 Youth Project**



M13 works with over 600 young people a year in Ardwick, to promote fun, learning, action and change within young people, our workers and the communities in which we live and work.

As a detached youth work project, we're used to being out and about informally with children and young people in the spaces in which they choose to spend time. This obviously had to change at the beginning of lockdown and forced us to think about new ways of engaging. Our ability to remain in close contact with the young people we work with throughout lockdown, despite the restrictions, has been of great importance to them: being 'socially close' whilst initially having an enforced physical distance – being available and present in the spaces where they are.

To begin with, these spaces were online, using apps that we knew of – and some that we previously didn't! – to meet up and chat with young people virtually. To our surprise and delight, these online groups were established by young people, as an extension of our regular weekly group meetings:

– **When we messaged our younger girls' group to talk about setting up a WhatsApp group specifically for online conversations, a 13-yr old member told us she'd 'beaten us to it', and would add us workers to their group!;**

– **Whilst messaging a group of lads (aged 15) about using WhatsApp to meet up virtually, they asked if we could instead use Discord (an app at that stage unfamiliar to workers), as they were already using it to chat and play games with each other;**

– **A member of a third, older girls' group (aged 19) suggested her group use Zoom to meet up, as that was the way her church was continuing to meet.**

This is how M13's online groups were birthed overnight and we have since continued to meet without a break, even in the week that lockdown was announced.



Our experience illustrates young people's initiative, resilience, adaptability and creativity

Having the technology to do this has obviously played a huge part in enabling us and young people to remain in contact – and we all know, sadly, that technology and data are not available for far too many children and young people. However, our experience illustrates young people’s initiative, resilience, adaptability and creativity; and the relationships of trust and fun that workers have been able to establish with young people prior to lockdown – particularly workers’ willingness to be present in the spaces that young people hang out in; and to be ‘socially close’ to young people. Our invitation into young people’s online spaces relied on the fact that we had previously shared a level of physical, emotional and social closeness with young people and had gained their trust.



It was great to be back out on the streets, although we were very aware at that stage of both our and young people’s potential vulnerability, as so much was (and still is) unknown about virus transmission, infection and immunity

Maintaining contact with young people for whom we didn’t have mobile numbers and who we would usually only see on detached youth work sessions was initially more challenging, until we restarted ‘protective’ detached youth work in May. It was great to be back out on the streets, although we were very aware at that stage of both our and young people’s potential vulnerability, as so much was (and still is) unknown about virus transmission, infection and immunity. As a manager of a predominantly Black and Brown staff team, I was extremely aware of the higher risks to our staff, in the light of evidence that Covid-19 disproportionately impacts Black and Brown people due to health inequalities and structural racism.

However, knowing many young people were out and about, we were eager to restart our street-based work (the bread and butter of our regular offer to young people) to re-establish contact and be present with them. It has been humbling to have young people, both out on the street and those in their houses, spotting us as we’ve walked around, shouting us over or coming out to see us, simply to talk; exchanging ‘elbow’ greetings instead of fist bumps, telling us how much they have missed having us around to chat with and sharing their experiences and concerns amidst our traditional banter.



Many Black and Brown young people wanted to discuss the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, international protests, and the increasing recognition of structural racism in the UK and its impacts

Although our ‘brief’ was to discuss Covid-19 safety measures and how young people were coping, there were so many other things young people wanted to chat through with us. For some, it was the relief of not having to be in school, a place they experience as ‘hostile’, highly stressful and traumatising. Many young people struggle to engage with school in the way school requires, due to bullying, ADHD, anxiety, trauma, or significant home responsibilities and they are frequently punished for this. A young person’s previous comment, ‘I wish you could tell them [school] what I’m really like’ sadly comes to mind. Others wanted to discuss the added stress that Covid-19 had brought to their home situation and how they could cope. Many Black and Brown young people wanted to discuss the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, international protests, and the increasing recognition of structural racism in the UK and its impacts.

All of these issues continue to need our careful listening and our willingness to stand with young people and take action together for justice and truth. Despite the restrictions of lockdown, the grief of Covid-19 and the horrors of other national/international events, there has been talk of a ‘moment of collective hope’. However at the same time, to our shock, dismay and anger, there have been situations in Manchester, both in the youth sector and more widely, appearing to push back against the BLM movement and racial equality. This has highlighted, for me anyway, some of the realities of the struggle ahead, and the absolute necessity that we stand together and take considered action for justice and truth, as [we] white folk become increasingly aware of the injustices that Black and Brown people have been resisting for a long time. Frances Kendall (2013:61) sums this up, ‘*Often unless the stories [of injustice] are undeniably horrendous, white people don’t seem to be moved [by Black people’s experiences of racism].*’



the council have absolutely relied on the VCSE sector to offer any response to Manchester's children and young people outside of school provision... seeking to forge effective partnerships with us and relying on our local knowledge of what's happening on the ground

As I've been in contact with other local youth and play work projects, I've seen our experiences replicated across many community-rooted, front-line projects in Manchester. Workers and volunteers have committed to being available to their neighbourhoods' children and young people – willing to risk vulnerability in the face of Covid-19. This has been vital, as with no statutory youth or play service in Manchester, the council have absolutely relied on the VCSE sector to offer any response to Manchester's children and young people outside of school provision. They have been open about this, seeking to forge effective partnerships with us and relying on our local knowledge of what's happening on the ground to inform their plans. This has been welcome and something to be continued.

I've watched many other similar groups in the community I'm part of step forward, take initiative, be creative and work together to meet the needs of the whole community, responding with offers of food, friendship and practical support, forging new, informal and pragmatic alliances quickly and generously, in order to 'get help done'.

Moving forward, I don't want us to forget the lessons that Covid-19 has taught us: about the value of our key workers; about the inspiring creativity, initiative and collaborative spirit of our city's children and young people and the VCSE sector working with them, despite massive under-investment and few resources; and about our anger at racism, inequality and injustice, propelling us to action. VCSE organisations have the unique ability to be available to their communities and a willingness to be vulnerable with and alongside people. I hope this will be respected for the precious gift that it is – as it seems to me to be what is required for us to survive such times of hardship.

²Kendall, F.E. (2013) Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships across Race 2nd Edition. Abingdon, Routledge

Finding the Key to Unlocking Lockdown



Many older people are desperate for things to go back to the way they were

**Helen Hibberd, Co-ordinator,
Chorlton Good Neighbours**

Chorlton Good Neighbours aim is to reduce social isolation, and ensure that through a range of opportunities, services and activities our older residents have a valued, meaningful and enjoyable older age.

Lockdown for our older members has brought out the whole spectrum of emotions and approaches.

Some people have embraced the time, seeing it as “giving permission” to take things a bit slower, and to get focused on restarting creative pursuits or starting ones that they had never done before. I heard comments like “I am doing more exercise than ever before” or “I have found a new hobby – diamond painting ‘or’ I am sewing a patchwork” and “I am using the time to research local history and writing it up”. These activities may never have happened without this time, and one hopes people feel they can continue finding that physical and mental space to carry on with these once we return to a “new normal”. After all, what is retirement for if it’s not for doing what brings us pleasure!



For many others, lockdown has been really tough; you can sense how tortuous it has been as the days pass endlessly and ‘blend into one’



For many others, lockdown has been really tough; you can sense how tortuous it has been as the days pass endlessly and “blend into one”. Even for those of us who are working, the lack of routine activities happening throughout the week has taken some mental adjustment. I can no longer think “It’s Thursday today – great its coffee morning, lets brace ourselves for the chaos!”

Now, many of our older members admit they are very fed up and want to get back to normal. It has gone on too long and they understand how detrimental it has been - “I feel lethargic” or “I know I am watching too much TV” or “I have been out for a walk recently as I was getting so low”.

What do they make of the lifting of restrictions?

Fear, confidence, anxiety, not knowing, self-protection – they all come into play. It is difficult balancing risk with the desire to re-engage with the community. Some people are going out every day, walking a bit further each time to build up their confidence. They use strategies such as getting to the shops early when there are less people around or walking to a nearby friend’s house. Little and often seems a good approach, so they can become desensitised to the outside noises, traffic and people.

Others are shocked when they go out the first time, and don’t quite understand what the social distancing is about. Queuing, following arrows, contactless payments, face masks... it is too much for a few and they rush back home, feeling anxious and unsafe.



The new skills that people have picked up during lockdown, such as learning how to shop online are really useful in one way, but potentially could delay people re-engaging

A few of our older members, and maybe this is more widespread than we think, have no intention of venturing out soon. I have heard comments such as “I am not in any hurry to get out after being safe for so long. I am going to wait until it is very safe”. “I feel happy in my cocoon and am not anxious to get out and about”.

The new skills that people have picked up during lockdown, such as learning how to shop online are really useful in one way, but potentially could delay people re-engaging. For many older people, going to

the shops a few times each week was the one activity that guaranteed them a chance for a chat. If there is no reason to do that then maybe they won’t.

Re-engagement

My feeling is that we can all be influencers of a kind. One chap said to me the only reason he began taking himself out for a walk two times each day was because his GP told him to do so. I am hopeful we can make inroads if we support our people with kindness and understanding, and try to find strategies which address their particular concerns.



Adapting key services has taught us what is valuable and vital to our older members, as well as confirmed the depth of commitment and generosity of our staff and volunteer workforce

What has lockdown meant for CGN?

In some ways it feels incredible that CGN, which has spent over 50 years slowly, painstakingly, building up a whole range of activities and services, adopting a perhaps falsely secure “bigger is better” approach, can be semi-toppled in a matter of months by something we can’t even see! Our mantra, for now, may have to be “smaller is safer”. The thriving coffee mornings for 80 older residents, the monthly Sunday teas with meals and entertainment, coach trips and parties are all on the back-burner.

Currently, our main service provision is shopping, door step chats, telephone befriending, odd jobs and regular paper/online communications. From August, we are tentatively restarting small activities – gardening club, small outdoor positive living groups, and 1-1 home visits. There is an underlying nervousness, no matter how confident we feel, in our risk assessments, signage and knowledge. After all, we feel responsible for people yet are in the same mental space as everyone else. One day we feel full of positive energy and reassure ourselves with “It will be fine. Let’s just get on with it” followed by a wobbly moment.

One of the major things we have learnt was just to get on and find our own solutions and trust our own judgements. The initial scrabbling around for answers and confirmation for this and that, particularly from those we thought had the answers, proved somewhat fruitless. That said, we were given freedoms in some areas that have been a real positive. Not having to

submit the usual monitoring forms has allowed us more creativity and personal insights in our report writing, case studies and general reflections. We think this will prove more useful for our funders.

Zoom meetings /webinars with funders, support organisations and community colleagues meant we could engage more frequently and purposefully. We were not weighing up whether a meeting was worth the time and effort to travel to.

A couple of key neighbourhood relationships have also strengthened over this period, for example, with our local Audiology Department and the Chorlton, Didsbury and Burnage Health Development Co-ordinator. There feels more scope for mutual sharing of ideas and understanding of each other's roles.

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it feels incredible that CGN, which has spent over 50 years slowly, painstakingly, building up a whole range of activities and services , adopting a perhaps falsely secure 'bigger is better' approach, can be semi-toppled in a matter of months by something we can't even see!

Adapting key services has taught us what is valuable and vital to our older members, as well as confirmed the depth of commitment and generosity of our staff and volunteer workforce. The 21 volunteers carrying out regular telephone calls to 110 older members proved a quick and reliable way of disseminating information, as well as a way to carry out snapshot surveys on who had IT or how people were coping with lockdown. We know long term that offering a shopping service alone will not be an offer, as we wish to continue promoting independence and self-reliance, and want practical support to be part of a fuller 1-1 befriending relationship.

There is talk about 'no going back' and that may be a useful, even much needed, approach in some areas of our working life. However, I am not sure that is on the agenda for our older volunteers and members. What we had, and what we were doing and offering, was their lifeline. We shall aim to get back but it will take time, patience and living with necessary safeguards and adjustments in the interim.



Manchester's Time for a Zero Carbon Recovery



Identifying the hallmarks of a
successful 21st century city

**Jonny Sadler, Programme
Director, Manchester Climate
Change Agency**

MANCHESTER
CLIMATE CHANGE AGENCY

Working with local and international partners, Manchester Climate Change Agency works to engage Manchester's 550,000 residents and 18,000 businesses, to enable them to collectively define the city's future and play an active part in making it happen.

"You're kind of like a salesman, aren't you Jonny?"

As a man not hugely taken by the idea of buying and selling lots of stuff, the suggestion I might be in the sales business took me a little by surprise. I hadn't thought of it quite like that but my colleague was right, that's exactly what working in sustainability and climate change is all about. 'Selling' ideas to people ensures that what we do as a city delivers positive benefits for our citizens, the environment and our economy.

That was five years ago.

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Manchester's residents and businesses increasingly want their city's projects, policies, operations and individual behaviours to be about making the city... a better place

My job, and the job of the Climate Change Agency, has been evolving since then, particularly over the last four months. We now spend some of our time selling sustainability and climate change-related ideas, but more and more we are working with organisations and groups who have already bought-in and committed to making a positive impact, in Manchester and beyond. We have now reached a point where Manchester's residents and businesses increasingly want their city's projects, policies, operations and individual behaviours to be about making the city – and the world – a better place.

This desire has always been here but it's been thrown into even sharper relief through the Covid-19 pandemic. This period has given many people the opportunity to ask the questions *"What's important to me? What kind of life do I want? What kind of city will enable me to live that way?"*

The answers to these questions have been clear. People want Manchester to be a healthier, greener, fairer, inclusive, liveable city with good jobs for all. Herein comes the moment that everybody in the sustainability and climate change field has been waiting for.

There is a growing demand for the kind of action that will create the city people want, at the same time as making a positive contribution to tackling the global climate emergency.

A growing demand for improving the energy efficiency of our homes to help the 38,000 households currently living in fuel poverty, at the same time as reducing CO₂ emissions.



There is a growing demand for the kind of action that will create the city people want, at the same time as making a positive contribution to tackling the global climate emergency

A growing demand for helping people to shift from the private car to walk and cycle more; improving air quality and health whilst addressing our transport emissions.

A growing demand for buying from local businesses to keep more money and jobs in the local economy, at the same time as reducing the emissions embedded in the products and services we consume.

These and many other actions are what we need to simultaneously deliver the social, environmental and economic benefits that are fast becoming the hallmarks of a successful 21st century city.

So, where do we go next?

I believe there are five steps we need to take get our new post-Covid vision in place and start working quickly towards it:

1. Agree on our shared vision and priorities for action

We need to build a shared vision for the city we all want to be part of creating. Manchester's overarching strategy, the Our Manchester Strategy, is being reset this year. We have to ensure it captures the desires that we have heard expressed during the lockdown and since, including the need for ambitious action on climate change.

2. Measure what matters

Levels of health and wellbeing, the numbers of workers and businesses delivering socially and environmentally positive products and services, access to high quality and wildlife friendly green spaces, and others are much more likely to be in keeping with the vision we can expect to emerge.

3. Expand our 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approach to developing and implementing the Our Manchester Strategy

There's a good reason why policy makers involve citizens and businesses in developing policies and strategies; it helps to build ownership and responsibility to contribute towards their delivery. We need to continue to do more of this; building responsibility for 'bottom-up' action right across the city. We also need the City Council and other local strategic partners to continue to fulfil their part of the deal. We need partners to be on hand when help is needed to remove barriers that are limiting action. We need to expand the number of mechanisms for these 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' conversations, into every Manchester community and sector.

4. Strengthen our partnership-based approach to action

There will be many occasions where the 'top-down' interventions we need won't be possible with the City Council's existing powers and funding. On that basis we also need to extend our partnership-based approach to working with Greater Manchester and government. The run-up to the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in November 2021 gives us a major opportunity to put this in place to help deliver our climate change commitments.

5. Equality, diversity and inclusion

The groups that the Agency currently convenes and engages are far from representative of the city's diverse communities. We need to work much harder to get this right. Across the city we need to challenge ourselves to ensure that those most in need and those currently underrepresented in our work are top of the list for any new engagement and support activities.

In combination, these five actions will help to bring about the systemic changes that we need to transform our city for the better. A number of them are based on the approach set out in the Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-25 and our recent letter to Manchester City Council on the city's green recovery in June 2020.

To a point, they build on the approach already in train in the city. However, when fully implemented, they will expose some difficult challenges. They will expose the fact that the current consumption-based economic model serves neither our people nor our planet in the way they deserve. They will expose that some of our priorities in previous years, whilst seemingly the right

ones at the time, have made our tasks more difficult going forward, particularly when it comes to reducing carbon emissions to zero.

We need to have the bravery to accept and confront these challenges, acknowledging that systemic change is difficult but also knowing that when we get it right, we'll have championed a new model of kinder, fairer, greener, healthier, zero carbon and inclusive city growth. The timing has never been better to put it in place.

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The current consumption-based economic model serves neither our people nor our planet in the way they deserve

Powerful and Loud Again - Not 'Vulnerable'!



Ignored, stigmatised and angry: the experience of disabled people

Michele Scattergood, CEO,
Breakthrough UK



An organisation of disabled people, which promotes the rights and responsibilities of disabled people and supports disabled people to live independently and get into work.

I did not think it would take a global pandemic to reignite the fire in the belly of disabled people and their organisations but it has!

On a variety of levels, I see disabled people and our organisations coming together again at a frequency we have not seen for a long time. Over the past six years or more, our organisations have been forced into trenches by competition for grants and contracts. Our people have been demonised by welfare reform and told to shake up and be more resilient. However, at this time of crisis we have come back over the top to fight.

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Disabled people are fighting another battle: the battle of the war of words!

We all now know that the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the extensive social and economic inequality in Manchester that has always been there. I know that communities have pulled together to support each other and colleagues across the VCSE sector have worked tirelessly to ensure people are not hungry, and that kindness has flowed in abundance. The best of people has shone through.

What I did not expect was that so many disabled people would feel so abandoned. That they would describe their lives as being devalued throughout this experience. Disabled people are fighting another battle; the battle of the war of words!

I was reminded just the other day of the line “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”. We all know that is not true and that discrimination is often demonstrated in words.

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As someone who has worked tirelessly for the last thirty years to promote independence and fight for rights and equality, the word ‘vulnerable’ is not a word that sits well

Disabled people have been described as vulnerable throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. As someone who has worked tirelessly for the last thirty years to promote independence and fight for rights and equality, the word 'vulnerable' is not a word that sits well.

It was often stated in the early days of lockdown that most people did not need to be concerned as the virus will only seriously affect 'the vulnerable'. So they called us vulnerable and shielded some of us. Shielded? For many of us, that resulted in shielding from support, PPE, medical equipment, testing and information.

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We are disabled people... but we are individuals. We need accessible support, advice, information, respect and love – just like everyone else

I am not denying our war has been with a virus to which some disabled people and people with long-term conditions are more at risk of dying from once infected. We know it is true as it has been reported that a third of Covid-19 deaths have been disabled people or people with long-term health conditions. The Government has been right on that score. We are at risk of the virus and continue to be. However, our war has also been with the dehumanising descriptions of us as 'vulnerable'. So, why are we SO angry if it is true and we are susceptible to dying at an exceptionally high rate?

Vulnerable suggests passivity. It can foster a 'them and us' approach. Other words commonly associated with vulnerable are 'fragile', 'unsafe' and 'endangered'. Do these descriptions make you feel good, safe and loved? Not us either!

Disabled people have campaigned hard for the last 35+ years to not be defined by our impairments and health conditions. We have asked for people to consider and identify the environmental and systematic disabling barriers that prevent us from living the best lives we can as independent people.

Yet, throughout the pandemic, we have seen disabled people not able to find the information and health care they have needed in an accessible way. This has impacted on their quality of life and in some cases death.

We must challenge these negative terms and start to use words that are positive, empowering or just plain factual. We are disabled people yes, there are bits of us that do not work or are missing but we are individuals. We need accessible support, advice, information, respect and love – just like everyone else.

The Change that People Experiencing Multiple Disadvantage Want and Need



Invest, involve, understand and trust to make a best future

Paul Pandolfo, Programme Manager and Tess Tainton, Involvement Officer, Inspiring Change Manchester

The mission of Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM) is to transform the way people experiencing multiple disadvantage are treated and receive services through testing new approaches, conducting research, funding innovation and promoting policy and system change

Paul Pandolfo

It feels odd in June 2020 to be talking about 'not going back' to what was happening before the Covid-19 pandemic. It is still with us, and health risks will remain for a long time yet; especially for those who were already experiencing disadvantage and deprivation. It has, however, been a crisis of such an epic proportion that actions and policies that felt almost impossible beforehand have come to pass. Fresh light has been shone on the rights, resources and approaches that are needed to ensure the most vulnerable in society are protected.

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What was happening before Covid-19 was not working well enough for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, on any measure relating to life opportunities, health outcomes and poverty

What was happening before Covid-19 was not working well enough for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, on any measure relating to life opportunities, health outcomes and poverty. We were 'managing' or 'firefighting' repeat homelessness rather than ending it. Too many people have been revolving through systems primarily occupied with responding to their immediate situation. As a society, we should be about people having a right to the dignity and safety that a home brings, and whatever support is needed for that to be maintained.



**Inspiring
Change
Manchester**

For ICM, our main challenge as Covid-19 broke was to be there for our members as best we could. Whatever situation they were in, we offered whatever we could to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission and mitigate the impact of many public services being suspended or much reduced. As with other support services, lockdown measures stopped use of our Hub, the community space in which much of our connection with people had taken place. This broke a psychological contract with members that had been in place for over six years; that regardless of where people were at in life, the ICM Hub was a place where they could come to, connect with people and offload. We observed that around the city, other services and outreach support were winding up or reducing, another worry as our members often access multiple services for basic needs.



Being evidence and information led was key to understanding what was needed; it should also be part of any future planning

We've seen people move between different temporary accommodation and spending time on the streets during the pandemic. The GM THINK system, devised by people who were tired of repeating their story and having services that felt unconnected, came into its own. We linked virtually with agencies signed up to the system and communicated live information. It was used to address the difficult issue of knowing who might be most at risk, who was shielding, and what people's Covid-19 status was. Without that, supporting public health advice for people who move frequently between accommodation and different services felt impossible. Being evidence and information led was key to understanding what was needed; it should also be part of any future planning as Covid-19 subsides.

We don't have all the answers to 'what next?' for people experiencing multiple disadvantage but we did conduct a members survey, focus groups and interviews part-way through lockdown so we could understand how things had been going. The findings were:

– **Personalised budgets and flexible funds are an incredibly important investment. They can help people to make transitions, for example from temporary accommodation placements that have broken down, discharge from hospital or release from prison or just as circumstances change. They can also help people to stay connected to their support networks. Sometimes it wasn't seeing someone in person that was needed, it was practical help requiring resources.**

– **Greater use of 'virtual support' can help people to stay connected to services where they are facing transition through Covid-19 response measures. Whilst it's not been without challenge, telephone and online support has led to stronger connections with people than before. 'Stickability' and being there for ICM members for the long run, especially during difficult transition points, had previously been key learning for us. Virtual contact has often helped strengthen this and we have been able to step in remotely and advocate throughout the pandemic.**

– **Developing Psychological Informed Environments (PIE) approaches, including the use of reflective practice, can help staff to deal with trauma and challenges posed by the pandemic. As staff begin to return to working in the community and have to support people out of this period, their own wellbeing will remain crucial in offering person-centred support.**



The Government's 'Everybody In' investment and direction, coupled with enormous efforts to implement this locally, has shown that rough sleeping can be addressed within days

With regard to homelessness, the Government's 'Everybody In' investment and direction, coupled with enormous efforts to implement this locally, has shown that rough sleeping can be addressed within days. However, that was a point-in-time emergency initiative, a few months later everybody isn't in and each week more people become homeless unnecessarily. Also, there's still a tendency to frame homelessness as about personal failings rather than policy failure and broken systems.

Celebrating what's been achieved with an increased sense of community during the pandemic is so important, but so is exploring gaps in the safety nets that have been exposed. Any plan for system change arising from Covid-19 must be informed by that great untapped knowledge, the experience of those who have been at the brunt end of flawed social policy. We need to be ready to explore the territory where charitable endeavour and philanthropy meets state responsibilities, rights and legal protections.

I'm still struck by the simplicity of what those who knew best from their own experience told us when we were designing ICM: don't judge and label me, invest in me, let me help decide, involve me, employ me; focus on me the person, take time to understand my history and my best future, not just unconnected snapshots of my life; trust and hope that's been long lost can be rebuilt if there's the option of having someone in my corner who has walked in my shoes in some way. From that transformation - 'no going back' will be possible.

Tess Tainton

When I've spoken to people about the good that has happened for people since lockdown began, the responses have invariably been about: the speed in which decisions about service users care have been made; the 'red tape' which has been removed; organisations working together; and the ability to prioritise service user's needs. The benefits of this could be long lasting. In ICM, tenancies have started in this period and asks which were being made have had positive outcomes. However, the speed of this progress has come with large drawbacks.



The service user voice was lost and there is a risk that by focusing on the progress we have made with rapid decision making, we will not resume placing those with lived experience at the centre of choices we have to make

Before lockdown, my role looked at increasing and developing areas for service user involvement within systems change. When lockdown commenced, suddenly, I was unable to do this. There were decisions which had to be made about services, provision, processes and many other areas, which had to be made immediately. There was no time to consider anything other than governmental and public health guidelines to ensure the health of the population. The service user voice was lost and there is a risk that by focusing on the progress we have made with rapid decision making, we will not resume placing those with lived experience at the centre of choices we have to make.

When deciding what needs to continue or be adapted, we have to consider the views of all who have lived through these times – this includes both those receiving and providing support. It would be easy to say “we need to coproduce what we build next” but that isn't possible. We can't start from scratch and create an ideal way of working together, but we can combine all the knowledge and expertise we have at our fingertips, from those who have experienced services pre-March 2020, during the crisis and those who be supported post-crisis.



Let us take what we have been talking about for the last few years around truly hearing the experiences of service users and combine it with working together across organisations in a timely manner, and embed it

To not go back, we have to co-design what happens next. Let us take what we have been talking about for the last few years around truly hearing the experiences of service users and combine it with working together across organisations in a timely manner, and embed it as a non-negotiable part of rebuilding. We wouldn't tell someone what their care will be without first listening to them, let's not tell people what the system will be without taking the time to listen.

48 Hours!



Rapid transformation of services for LGBT people

Rob Cookson Deputy CEO, LGBT Foundation

LGBT Foundation is a nationally significant charity firmly rooted in the local communities of Greater Manchester that supports the diverse range of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans

“This is going to change everything”. Those are the words I remember hearing from a colleague when we were at the start of the Covid-19 crisis. It will affect our service users. Our staff. Our volunteers. All of society. It felt like the world was being turned upside down. Everything we took for granted, everything we loved about life, now restricted.

Looking back, it all happened so quickly. 48 hours. That is how long we had to transform our service provision. 48 hours to make sure that our counselling service was still operational. 48 hours to ensure our Helpline telephone support service could be delivered remotely. 48 hours to ensure we could still provide information and support regarding sexual health.

I am proud of the way our charity, indeed the VCSE sector more broadly, has responded. Within the space of 48 hours we had set up a virtual counselling service, ensuring LGBT people who desperately needed to access mental health and wellbeing support could do so. I am also proud that our Helpline service, which is 45 years old this year, was able to not only be delivered remotely but also for the service to be extended to weekend provision. I am also proud that we were able to provide tailored sexual health information and support.

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That meant us delivering services in different ways, making sure we kept asking ourselves the question, not what we cannot do, but what can we do?



At LGBT Foundation, our key message is that ‘We Are Here If You Need Us.’ To stay true to our values during Covid-19, that meant us delivering services in different ways, making sure we kept asking ourselves the question, not what we cannot do, but what can we do? With a dedicated, skilled and motivated staff and volunteer team, you can achieve a lot in 48 hours!



A clear communications message
- underpinned by compassionate
leadership

Of course, some of the plans we put in place and aspects of our operational delivery took a little longer than 48 hours! However, looking back, those first two days were crucial. They set our response, by making sure that all the building blocks of a successful response to Covid-19 were there – a detailed risk register, innovative new service provision, a clear communications message - underpinned by compassionate leadership, a community assets-based approach, and a skilled and passionate volunteer and staff team.

I am not sure where to start with lessons learned. We introduced a system early on of regular engagement and communication with a range of key stakeholders, including funders. We recognised that our funders would be struggling too – worried about loved ones, concerned about isolation and, perhaps, fearful of the future. It has been a very positive experience talking to funders, being open both about the challenges but also about the possibilities.



Another lesson learned is never to underestimate the power of people to make the world a better place

Another lesson learned is never to underestimate the power of people to make the world a better place. As a result of Covid-19 we developed a new, innovative service called Brew Buddies. This is a supportive, structured conversation each week with isolated LGBT people. I have been trained and paired up with someone to support on Brew Buddies, and it's been a very positive experience – helping to reduce their isolation, and if I am honest, my isolation too.

When thinking about lessons learned, we need it grounded in the evidence. Knowing our communities and their needs is crucial to how collectively Greater Manchester shapes its longer-term response to Covid-19. In May 2020, LGBT Foundation published findings from the largest and most substantive research into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on LGBT communities in the United Kingdom to date.

This research showed some of the impact Covid-19 has had on LGBT people, including:

42%

of LGBT people would like to access support for their mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic

18%

of LGBT people are concerned that this situation is going to lead to substance or alcohol misuse or trigger a relapse

8%

of LGBT people do not feel safe where they are currently staying.

The next phase of Covid-19 is going to be equally as challenging but the possibilities will be large too. Doesn't this give us, all of us, a chance to, well do things a bit differently? To develop new services. To fund VCSE organisations in a more longer-term manner, and to ensure that no one in society is left behind.

It is the possibilities that we, as colleagues across Greater Manchester, need to focus on. Possibilities like having people in our communities, including LGBT people, more at the heart of decision making. Also ensuring that people's lived experiences shape not just our responses to Covid-19 but more broadly about how we wish to live our lives. We might have slightly longer than 48 hours to develop these responses, but the clock is ticking. Let's seize this opportunity to do things differently.

@TruthPoverty

#ExpertsByExperience

#ThisShouldAlwaysBeNormal

“

We are checking in with our neighbours. Asking how they are and helping where we can

“

We are recognising that people in poverty have always been in need

“

Local decision making has allowed for better solutions

“

Using tech to free us has been fantastic. Everyone should have this



The Lovely People We Work With Deserve Better



Injustice, exclusion and the scandal of social care for people living with dementia

Sally Ferris, CEO, Together Dementia Support

Together Dementia Support offers support and therapeutic activities for people living with dementia, their carers and supporters in Manchester

I might be a CEO but I'm also a team worker who is motivated by the buzz of enabling things to happen and seeing the outcomes for our beneficiaries, so working from home, in relative isolation, doesn't really suit me. More than that, I feel a constant anxiety that we're not doing enough to support our members, people living with dementia and their carers.

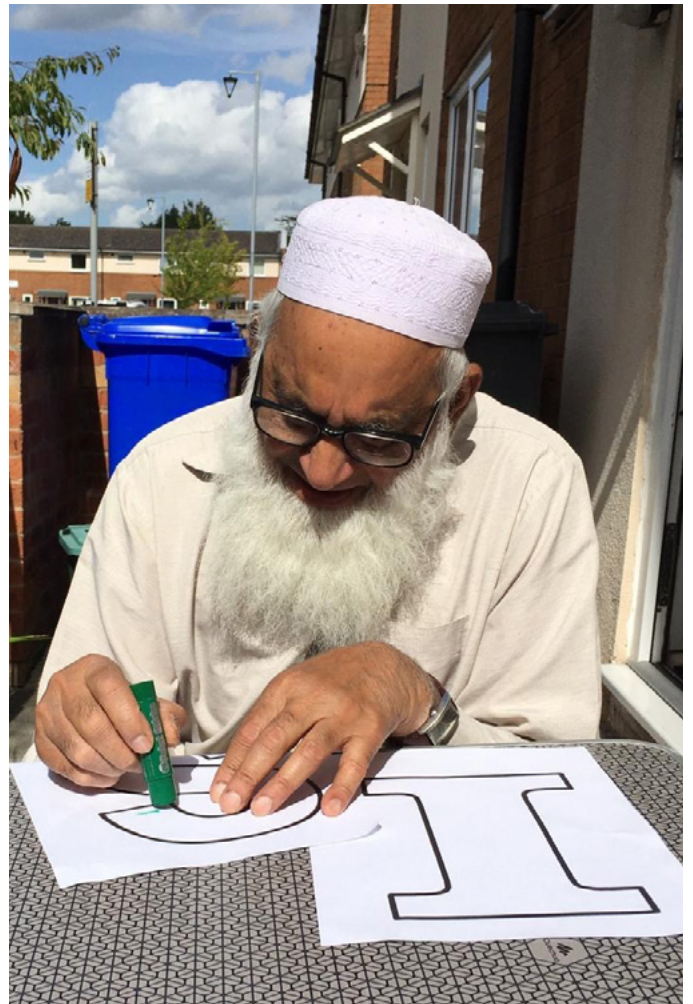
Before lockdown, we could count the outputs of our work: number of people attending groups, number of care contacts, number of referrals to other agencies. We could observe, and were beginning to measure, the impact of our service delivery. In fact, we had just started an external evaluation with the Institute for Dementia at Salford University – and then it had to be postponed.



Staff have been creative and resourceful and they've gone above and beyond in adding personal touches – homemade cream teas, Easter or Eid treats

Staff have stepped up to the challenge of providing individual support to members and they have certainly got to know both them and their family carers much better – a positive outcome! However, this work has been more time-consuming and so they've had to prioritise members and type of activity. Is it worth driving a distance to have a doorstep visit with a member, or better to make six social phone calls? Staff have been creative and resourceful in making up personalised activity packs to deliver and they've gone above and beyond in adding personal touches – homemade cream teas, Easter or Eid treats. Such things might sound amateurish but if they brighten up someone's day or help a carer to get through another day, that's an important impact.





Over the last few months I have trusted my staff, allowing them to work their hours more flexibly if this meets both the service's needs and the members. One took a fish and chip supper to an isolated man and sat outside with him while he ate them. If staff are prepared to perform such acts of kindness then I should allow them to finish early or start later on another day. It's been important to listen to and recognise when staff are struggling personally. Each of them have different pressures and anxieties and so flexible working allows them to look after themselves.

We've also recognised the added value that our volunteers bring. Supporting a large caseload of people who are having a difficult time takes its toll on anyone's emotional wellbeing – and our staff WhatsApp group has been a good place to offload or ask if anyone is free for a chat. However, many volunteers are able to share the load and support a few members as well. The pride they take in their own work means that those members are well looked after. We then have to remind ourselves of the need to support and supervise the volunteers – another increased responsibility for me to oversee.

Together Dementia Support prides itself in responding to need and being innovative. If it's needed and we can do it – we should! Too often obstacles are put in the way, particularly in the realm of adult social care, so I've felt quite a weight of responsibility in assessing whether it's safe and advisable to do x or y. I've recognised that I need to pick up the phone more readily to find out what other organisations are doing. Are we in line with generally agreed best or safe practice?

Then there's the online communication... Zoom and Facebook groups have been such a help to staff, volunteers and some of our members. Members living with dementia have loved seeing familiar faces and this has reduced their sense of isolation considerably. However, this improved connectivity for some reminds me about the injustice and exclusion of the many people who don't have Wi-Fi or the necessary devices. I believe Wi-Fi in every home should be standard, as important as central heating. With some additional funding from the Lottery, we have bought and distributed Echo Show devices (amongst others) to members which means we can video call a member without them having to press any buttons at all. There is still more investment needed in dementia-friendly technology but it's cheered up some of our members no end. Some have managed to tell Alexa what to do but the politeness of many older people, in insisting on saying "Please..." has been a stumbling block!

The Lottery has been great to our charity, encouraging us to apply for a grant to enable us to support more people during lockdown and to trial these technological devices. Other grant funders have also kept us going, being helpful and accommodating. However, we know that all good things can come to an end and so it feels a

little scary, having increased our staffing whilst knowing that the funding may not be there in a year's time. This is compounded by the fact that we've not been able to hold any fundraising events. We will have to become more innovative about fundraising too!

Finally, what have we have learned about social care in England? We've learned that it is scandalously uncared for. I won't be donating to an NHS charity as I'd rather give money to a local care home or support a day centre that can't afford to re-open its doors. Together Dementia Support is just one part of a bigger jigsaw of support to older or disabled people. Our members might also rely on home care, day care, respite care and residential care, most of which are run as businesses. If the Government can subsidise restaurants to run with reduced occupancy, why haven't they done the same for day centres or supported home care agencies to be able to spend more time with the people they visit? We will persuade and support people to come out, go for walks, meet individually or in small groups, as lockdown eases. However, some carers need more than that and day care, if it was easily available, could give them the breaks they deserve and need.



If we truly value our older people and those with disabilities, we'll all have to ensure that there is no going back to the fragmented Cinderella service that social care has been

I will keep banging the drum for the lovely people with whom we work as they deserve better. At our groups we celebrate each individual, helping them to tell their life stories and showing off what they can still do. At present they are hidden behind their front doors but, if we truly value our older people and those with disabilities, we'll all have to ensure that there is no going back to the fragmented Cinderella service that social care has been.

On a personal note, one good thing about working from home has been that I can go out and tend to my garden in my lunch break. I nurture my favourite flowers, as if their lives depend on my care, and am furious if a slug destroys even one in the night. We should all feel this about every single person whose life has been cut short by Covid-19. They are so much more than numbers.

All those who work in social care will know it can be highly skilled work, requiring significant resources, but it also requires kindness and commitment. There have certainly been random acts of kindness in some neighbourhoods towards older and vulnerable people - but we need long term societal commitment too.

We All Need Someone



Re-setting self and services
for children and families in
troubled times

Shelley Roberts, Chief
Executive, Home-Start



Home-Start provides peer support through local volunteers who are trained to provide long-term weekly support to families with young children, through an approach of trust, relationship and shared experience

Being the leader of a charity supporting volunteers to support children and families has always felt such a blessing. Cultivating a service born out of and wrapped around shared human experience and connection is such a simple concept yet seeing it in action, repeatedly, has never become any less than moving for me.

Covid-19 and the response of our staff, volunteers, families and communities has cemented that passion, as has the support and understanding of partners and funders. With the exception of ensuring children are safe and that support is effective and responsive to people's needs and organisations are compliant, it feels like we have all been let off the hook from the worst of Covid-19.

It's okay that we're working from our dining room tables and can't connect properly to a Zoom call.

It's okay to give up on home schooling and watch a film with the kids in your pyjamas.

It's okay to feel glum and not need to question or feel guilty about it.

It's okay to re-jig your budget lines to fund essential packages for families and take your volunteer training online. It's okay to spend the whole team meeting practicing mindfulness together and putting off business until tomorrow.

For the first time, it seems we all have real permission not to be okay and something weird has happened. We're all suddenly inspired to be kind, to each other and to ourselves, and in that we grow and we find our resilience.



THE best way to support someone... is through building a trusting and deeply connected... relationship with that person and in their 'space'

I always supported and understood the concept of a strengths/asset-based approach and it is threaded through Home-Start's work – our ultimate aim has always been to journey with families through support and into volunteering with us. However, if I'm being brutally honest, I often saw my team and other services grapple with this as the focus. It is much simpler, and often more gratifying in the short-term, to be a giver rather than an enabler. Never mind leading a duck to water, we were sometimes still drinking it for them!

The pandemic has proven something to us about the people we support. They are resourceful, they have amazingly creative ways of surviving, their adversity actually serves them, and they are humble and grateful.

In some cases but not all, before Covid-19 we made assumptions about what our families were capable of, what we thought was 'easier to do ourselves'. Families have proved us wrong – they've not always had the answer or made decisions that have led to their desired outcome but they've given us an opening and we need to harness that as we come out the other side.

HOWEVER...

I always knew this – the data and the testimonies back up my feeling, that THE best way to support someone in their entirety, to invoke and journey through real change with someone, is through building a trusting and deeply connected (even if bounded and professional) relationship with that person and in their 'space'.



It was bad before, it's beyond bad now

Since March 2020 we have seen our impact data plummet from an average of 80%+ improvement to below 40%. Families tell us that they desperately need face to face contact, physical connection – including hands on practical help, just another adult's company, someone to be with them physically through difficulties. So, our 'virtual' support is needed and valued and without it we know that families would be far more likely to reach crisis point, but it is not the long-term answer. As soon as it is absolutely safe to do so and when our families and volunteers feel ready, we want to be back in their homes and communities.

BUT...

Zoom has its place! It can't replace the laugh over a morning coffee or the moan about deadlines in the corridor, but boy have I been productive through video! I reckon I've saved about five hours travel time (and about £40 in costs) in navigating my way across and into Manchester each week. I can use some of that time, not to pack more work in but to refresh – a sit in the garden, a natter with my husband or a 20 minute meditation – to re-set and give the very best me to the next thing. This sudden new, self-compassionate, self-caring me has filtered into my team. Our mental well-being has suddenly become THE most important thing – hoorah!!

As an organisation we've found more effective and productive ways of working. We hope that this makes our service more accessible (for example, we are taking our volunteer training partly online which may attract prospective volunteers who couldn't commit to six weeks face to face). Time will tell but we also hope that some of our leaner ways of working will free up capacity to support more beneficiaries.

In terms of funding, because currently we do not rely heavily on income generated through fundraising activity but rather grants, trusts and statutory funding, we have actually attracted more financial support to respond to the pandemic.

I've been remarkably positive haven't I?! Actually, there's very little to be found in the way of silver linings for those impacted directly by the virus and my thoughts in no way attempt to take away from the agony and desperation experienced by those who are grieving, have no food on the table or feel every day like giving away their children because they can't cope for one more moment. It was bad before, it's beyond bad now.

My grave concern, however, is the impact on future funding. Over 50% of our income is from grants and trusts that depend on investment income. The competition was high and pots dwindling pre-Covid so we are really worried about the availability of funding from this source in the future.

I'm sure many of my colleagues will share their accounts of what life is like right now for our beneficiaries but there is one aspect of Covid-19 and lockdown that really stands out for me.

What it feels like to have nobody...

When friends and family ask what I do and enquire about the needs of the families we support, I'm always drawn to tell them about the many families that have no-one. The young mum estranged from her parents, the single mum seeking asylum with her two toddlers, the single dad with ASD that has lost both his parents and struggles to form relationships, the mum and baby who has fled domestic abuse and been safely re-homed in a town far away from home. Often the response is a blank face and "What do you mean, no-one?"



Will funders be able and/or willing to support organisations such as ours once the crisis phase is over?

I can't begin to imagine how I would have gotten through hard times without someone to cook me a meal, pick up some milk, ground me when I'm unravelling, make me laugh, take away some of my responsibilities. It is not directly comparable but I sense that lockdown has given most of us a taste of what isolation does to you as a human being. What I hope from this experience is that we are all inspired and driven to reach out to others that don't have a support network and start to help them to build one and become part of it. To the future – I worry about how we are going to manage demand for our services. We closed our waiting list in February this year due to unprecedented demand that we couldn't keep up with. We have volunteers but staff caseloads are full and the only remedy is to increase the size of our team. We just don't have the funds to do that – will funders be able and/or willing to support organisations such as ours once the crisis phase is over and organisations look to deliver the services their customers so desperately need? Our services were needed before Covid-19, and whilst we may have been forced to discover new, more efficient ways of working, for the people that need us, despite their resilience and resourcefulness, there's only so far you can bend before you break.

Efficiency or Equality: the future of digital



Digital solutions can hit targets when working with young people but can they address difference and deep rooted inequality?

Simone Spray, CEO, 42nd St

42nd St supports young people with their emotional wellbeing and mental health through offering a range of individual therapeutic support, learning opportunities, groups and creative activities.

42nd Street, like so many other organisations, responded quickly, with agility and as a team when we realised the enormity of the impact of Covid-19 in late March 2020. Young people were contacted, options for support discussed, safeguarding arrangements redesigned to account for isolated working and possible depletion of the staff team. Safe digital solutions that had already been tried and tested were ramped up, staff were trained, tech was supplied, online meetings became the norm. We recognised more than ever that we needed to look after each other as a workforce: we based our workloads on the emotional and physical capacity of individuals; had check-ins (until people asked for less); and we even brought in staff yoga, dance and gong sessions to give permission to people struggling to relax and boundary their work and take time out. Most importantly, the values of 42nd Street prevailed: trust, transparency, support and empowerment.

Some of the changes that we were 'forced' to make have (temporarily) improved our service already.

As one young person said to 42nd Street *"Why couldn't the changes have happened to speed up the waiting lists before Covid-19?"*

But what will we be able to realistically maintain? What will the broader system expect of us as we 'return to normal' and how, most importantly, can we ensure that any new solutions meaningfully involving those most affected in design and decisions?

Ruby Waterworth at Youth Access advocates for a rights-based approach to the new realities of mental health support for young people.

"An approach that demands for particular attention to be paid to the needs of young people who are more likely to suffer with their mental health, whose mental health problems intersect with wider societal issues and discrimination, and whose path to accessing quality support is more likely to be blocked".

Status quo thinking and planning will not suffice as we continue to respond to the impact of Covid-19. The truth is, it never did. The pandemic has brought into startling focus the exacerbation of the existing health, social and economic injustices played out in the mental health system. Whilst services and institutions are designed to appeal to and attract the majority, those that do not identify that way find it harder to engage or worse, feel alienated and even threatened by them. It's not good enough to say people are "hard to reach", or "hard to engage", perhaps it is our services that are

42 **ND**
STREET

'hard to access'. National targets and the fascination in efficiency and value for money do not translate easily into a system that addresses difference and deep rooted inequality.



Whilst services and institutions are designed to appeal to and attract the majority, those that do not identify that way find it harder to engage or worse feel alienated and even threatened by them

42nd Street entered lockdown with varying demand/capacity issues, and we expect demand to continue to increase. Research from MIND, the ONS and Oxford University highlights that the sharpest rise in mental health concerns during lockdown has been with young people. They are experiencing higher increases in rates of depression, anxiety and loneliness than any other group. They will be entering or returning to precarious employment, education and housing situations within a predicted recession and increases in the cost of living. Young people are reporting the lowest levels of life satisfaction with the percentage rising from 7.7 per cent, at the start of lockdown, to 20.8 per cent in June 2020, who are feeling that it will take a year or more for life to return to normal, or that life will never return to normal.



Our own conversations with young people reveal that many are experiencing increasing levels of complexity and more incidence of self-harm and suicidal thoughts

Our own conversations with young people reveal that many are experiencing increasing levels of complexity and more incidence of self-harm and suicidal thoughts. We have observed: increases in alcohol and substance misuse; anxiety around the ambiguity of returning, or not, to education; anxiety about parents returning to work (including being concerned about increased isolation and increased responsibilities); and we are seeing issues around complex trauma and complex bereavement emerging.

In short, our banks are breached and we can see a tidal wave making its inevitable way towards us - at increasing speed. We need a new architecture that addresses both the historical underinvestment and the surge to come.

Many are saying that the response going forward needs to be more investment into digital solutions, often (mistakenly) perceived as a way of increasing efficiencies and access figures. Certainly, I am supportive of embedding digital and online solutions into a blended model of support, but these decisions must be driven a need to broaden choice, address exclusion and meet need, not just efficiency. Prior to Covid-19, we were soft launching our online package of support including counselling, psycho-social support and group work using both synchronous (real time) and asynchronous, email and video support. The service was designed with young people and targeted support for young people that might not normally access more traditional approaches – never as a tool to manage existing demand. However, with limited choices available over lockdown, we have experienced an over 300% increase in demand for this service which is now beyond capacity.



I am supportive of embedding digital and online solutions into a blended model of support, but these decisions must be driven by a need to broaden choice, address exclusion and meet need, not just efficiency

What the last few months has confirmed for us is that digital solutions require careful consideration; there is a huge difference between implementing them as part of business continuity plan as opposed to a choice of modality - and there are implications for both staff and young people. There are very different and complex safeguarding conundrums to negotiate with blended models: staff need specialist training and support; there are serious considerations around compromising young people's confidentiality if they cannot find a private space; technology and digital poverty can be an issue; and for some, for example young people who may have attachment issues or communication difficulties, digital work does not hit the spot. However, digital services can and do reach those that would not ordinarily choose to, or are able to, cross service thresholds. These include, for example: young carers that cannot make appointments; young people who live in communities where there are cultural stigmas around mental health; economically disadvantaged young people that cannot afford to travel to sessions; young

people experiencing the care system; and LGBTQ+ young people, young people with physical disabilities. These are the very people that have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. So, if we are going to take a rights-based approach to our recovery planning and decisions about our digital solutions, it will be with the involvement of young people and based on the best ways to tackle these (exacerbated) health inequalities.



A recovery plan that recognises the real situation we are now all facing cannot be achieved unless we redefine the national targets and decentralise the 'recovery' response

The mental health response across Greater Manchester has been impressive; with strong leadership from the centre. The trust and relationships that we have developed over recent years, tested and refined in our collective response to the MEN Arena attack, seemed to make the integrated response a no-brainer. Our Greater Manchester VCSE Leadership group refocused their energies within days towards capturing the often hidden or seemingly invisible emerging issues and corresponding behaviours of people across our communities. Very soon we realised that the pandemic was having a disproportionate impact on individuals and families that many of our organisations routinely support, many of them not engaged with mainstream services and facing compounding vulnerabilities and embedded systemic inequality. This coordinated approach to gathering and understanding intelligence at a point where the usual data-sets were telling us very little informed conversations, and some action, around the first phase response. This is highlighted in the Health Innovation Manchester report commissioned to inform the GM recovery response.

However, a recovery plan that recognises the real situation we are now all facing cannot be achieved unless we re-define the national targets and decentralise the 'recovery' response. It cannot happen until we join the dots across sectors and listen to what communities are telling us and it certainly won't happen if we just try to build back the old architecture and simply rebadge it as 'better'.

"Human rights cannot be an afterthought in times of crisis — and we now face the biggest international crisis in generations... human rights can and must guide Covid-19 response and recovery... The message is clear: People — and their rights — must be front and centre".
- Secretary-General of the United Nations

There is no going back. Not just because things have changed so much over the past three months, or because we have learnt new ways of working, but fundamentally because there is lots that we should not go back to, let's leave it in the past where it belongs.

Useful Changes? Speaking Up and Making Things Better



Ripping up the book in advice services

Sinead O'Connor, CEO, CHAC



Cheetham Hill
Advice Centre

Cheetham Hill Advice Centre (CHAC) is a neighbourhood advice centre in North Manchester providing free advice on housing, benefits, immigration and debt.

Really early on in the pandemic I started asking a really simple question: What can we do to be useful? I started every week by asking my team that question and I used it as a guide to my work over the first month of the crisis and lockdown. This simple question helped guide us through all the uncertainty and allowed us to focus on the activity that would be beneficial to both our immediate community and to the wider system.

So what can we do to be useful – practical help and advice?

I am the manager of an independent advice charity in North Manchester. We provide advice in housing, benefits, debt and immigration. We're based in the heart of our community and we're always busy. We knew that due to the pandemic demand would increase and potentially become more complicated. The question we faced in lockdown was what type of help would people most need and how could we best provide that?



The question we faced in lockdown was what type of help would people most need and how could we best provide that?

We spoke to huge numbers of people needing to claim Universal Credit. We spoke to people who wanted information on the Government's schemes on furlough and self-employment income support. We gave advice on statutory sick pay, on claiming council tax support and on how to reduce and manage debt. We also advised people with no recourse to public funds who were stranded in the UK and could neither work nor leave.

Some of these areas of advice are new and some are the exact same issues we were advising on in January, just in a far greater concentration. We helped people who have never had contact with the benefits and tax credit systems before. We also helped people who have been managing on the smallest of budgets who have seen their household expenditure tighten further by the double whammy of less income coupled with supermarket shelves lacking in multi-purchase deals, cheaper food staples and fresh food marked down as it is close-to-date.

So what can we do to be useful – helping the system?

We were pretty sure we could be useful to the individual people we help but then we wondered how we could be useful to the wider system.

“ People can phone our charity and have advice in one of ten languages directly

We are proud as a charity of the fact that we are a trusted resource within the heart of our community. Part of this is because we can provide many people with advice in their first language. Within our staff team there are ten different languages spoken fluently. This means that people can phone our charity and have advice in one of ten languages directly. We are able to also provide advice via a translation service as many people, understandably, really like being helped in their first language.

We realised that this was what we had to offer the system. This was what we have that is useful in a wider sense, over and above what we do on a day-to-day basis. We reorganised our staff rota to maximise our language offer. We obtained a small amount of funding to boost this capacity and then started discussions with our existing funders.

All of this change made me question all of our work – and how we could remain useful – so I asked another key question.

If I were writing all my charity’s plans now, would they look anything like the plans that we had in place at the start of the crisis?

The clear answer to that is no. All the work we had planned, many of the initiatives we have been working on and much of the development work we were about to do was simply no longer a priority.

So what to do with that nugget of information?! It felt like ripping up all our plans was the most sensible thing to do – that would allow us to make best use our resources and achieve the maximum impact in the places where it was needed the most. How could I not only provide practical support and support the system but also influence the decision makers that shape our work and the lives of the people we work with?

The idea crystallised most clearly in a Twitter thread. The challenge then was to actually have that conversation with the funders themselves.

“ Every funder was amazing. The first thing they did was to listen

I’m not gonna lie, I was nervous making the calls. It helps that I believe in having an honest and transparent relationship with funders. I believe the best work is delivered when there is a synergy between funder priorities and project focus - that way the outcomes that matter are delivered and as a charity we can get on with delivering the work that we believe will be impactful and which the funder wants to see happen.

Every funder was amazing. The first thing they did was to listen. They stated that they respected our knowledge of our communities and that we had an insight into the emerging needs, problems and strengths that people have. They agreed to major changes to our grants. One funder agreed that we could use restricted funding for a different purpose than intended. Two funders said we could un-ring-fence activity so that worker time could be used on the frontline of service provision. All said that they were happy for a reduction in either the targets for each activity and in one case, a whole outcome was removed entirely.

“

All the work we had planned, many of the initiatives we have been working on and much of the development work we were about to do was simply no longer a priority

The impact of this has been profound. The flexibility has meant that we have been able to increase the debt casework and level one immigration advice we can provide. It has contributed to our boosted language offer and it has meant that we can direct our resources to where they can be most useful. This is currently on the frontline of services but this will likely change as we move through this crisis.



Sinéad O'Connor

@sineadei



I would honestly welcome a conversation with all my funders when we are through this pandemic. Let's discuss ditching plans, targets, everything.

1:57 pm · 2 Apr 2020 · [Twitter for Android](#)



Sinéad O'Connor @sineadei · 2 Apr



Replying to @sineadei

The question should be what would my charity be doing if we were designing everything from scratch to respond to the world we will emerge back into.



1



1



Sinéad O'Connor @sineadei · 2 Apr



What are the biggest problems, how are the community impacted, what might be useful responses?

Let's have that conversation



1



1



Sinéad O'Connor @sineadei · 2 Apr



My charity, like many others, exists in the heart of the community, operating on the ground, with a deep connection to people's lives

This is an opportunity to truly co-design some experience informed responses & have a substantial impact on how people & communities recover



2



3



Sinéad O'Connor @sineadei · 2 Apr



I hope funders are able to ask these questions, to have these conversations, because life as before won't exist and we have the chance to make what comes after better with our work [#EveryDayCounts](#) [#VCS](#) [#CommunityBased](#)

The conversation with funders has opened up the possibility of further flexibility too – that our response will likely evolve if needed while staying focussed on where we can have best impact.



Change that was unimaginable previously can happen very quickly in the right environment. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) changed many of the ways they administer the benefits system and these changes had a positive impact.

Change that was unimaginable previously can happen very quickly in the right environment. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) changed many of the ways they administer the benefits system and these changes had a positive impact. The DWP suspended reclaiming overpayments from people (which reduced a cause of debt), no mandated appointments at Job Centre Plus (and therefore no sanctions for non-attendance), no face-to-face medical assessments (which significantly reduced anxiety for people), six month extensions for people on benefits linked to health and disability (so a reduction in worry and bureaucracy), halting repayments to budgeting loans (so people had more income), tribunals made decisions based on submissions rather than in-person assessments (reducing stress on people). Really helpfully, the requirement to be actively seeking work while claiming Universal Credit was dropped – as was the requirement to be available for work. This made a huge difference to the quality of life for people who have lost work and income at the same time as they are caring for their families and are managing on a reduced budget.

All of these changes made an enormous improvement on people's lives at a time when they most needed that relief. It meant some extra work for us – keeping on track of the latest information and responding quickly to the environment – but these are the types of changes we would like to see continue into the future.

Change can overtake us quickly. As I reflect on the last six months, I am proud of the work we have done and the changes we have made. By being grounded in our community and the experiences of our staff and clients, we have been able to drive change at all levels. By being courageous and responsive in speaking up, we have been able to support people practically, strengthen the local system and influence decision makers to make positive changes to their approach. The pandemic and our response has shown us that seemingly immovable government legislation can not only move but can topple like dominos. We have also seen that the capacity and the insight to respond to change is more important than plans and conditions that are either out of date or not fit for purpose.

This type of approach shows us the strengths of the VCSE sector, our ability to be agile with our support as well as to speak up because we do want to be useful and we do want to make sure that we are responding to the actual world that we emerge into.



By being grounded in our community and the experiences of our staff and clients, we have been able to drive change at all levels

@TruthPoverty

#ExpertsByExperience

#ThisShouldAlwaysBeNormal

“

**Bin men rock!
They always did. It's
great this is being
recognised**

“

**I am helping my neighbours so
much. I could have always been
doing this and I am definitely
going to continue. It's just the
right thing to do**

“

**Getting food to the
people who need it
makes perfect sense**

“

**We want all this
to continue after
lockdown**



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Macc is a registered charity and works with a range of partners and other organisations to increase and develop the support available to the city's 3300+ voluntary organisations, community groups, charities and social enterprises. Macc delivers a wide range of these services including:

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- **capacity building for local groups**
 - **support for local people wishing to volunteer (Volunteer Centre Manchester)**
 - **policy support, insight and influence - including convening the city's Voluntary Sector Assembly**
 - **distributing grants to local groups and projects**
-

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