

# ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF CRISIS

Help through Crisis learning paper

May 2020

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## About the Help through Crisis programme

Help through Crisis (HtC) is a £33 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HtC supports 69 partnerships across England which help people who are experiencing or at risk of hardship crisis to overcome the difficulties they are facing to plan for their futures. The partnerships receiving National Lottery funding through the HtC programme bring together local small voluntary groups and established charities. Working together, they offer people advice, advocacy and support which matches their personal circumstances. The aim is to look at the issues people face, and the underlying causes, from their basic needs, to their physical and mental health, to skills and employment. People are supported to draw on their personal experiences to build on their skills and strengths so they are ready to seize the opportunities and challenges ahead.

## About the Learning, Support and Evaluation team

The HtC, Learning, Support and Evaluation (LSE) team is a consortium of organisations commissioned by The National Lottery Community Fund to help build understanding and capture learning from the HtC programme. The team is made up of people from Ipsos MORI (Lead Contractor), NEF Consulting, Revolving Doors Agency and Hopkins Van Mil. The role of the consortium is to work with the 69 partnerships involved in the programme to:

- Empower them to evaluate and measure their impact, and capture learning about what works in tackling hardship crisis.
- Support their co-production activities, ensuring the people they support have a voice in shaping local services.
- Identify good practice and disseminate learning to build the evidence base and help partnerships to replicate or scale up approaches from elsewhere.

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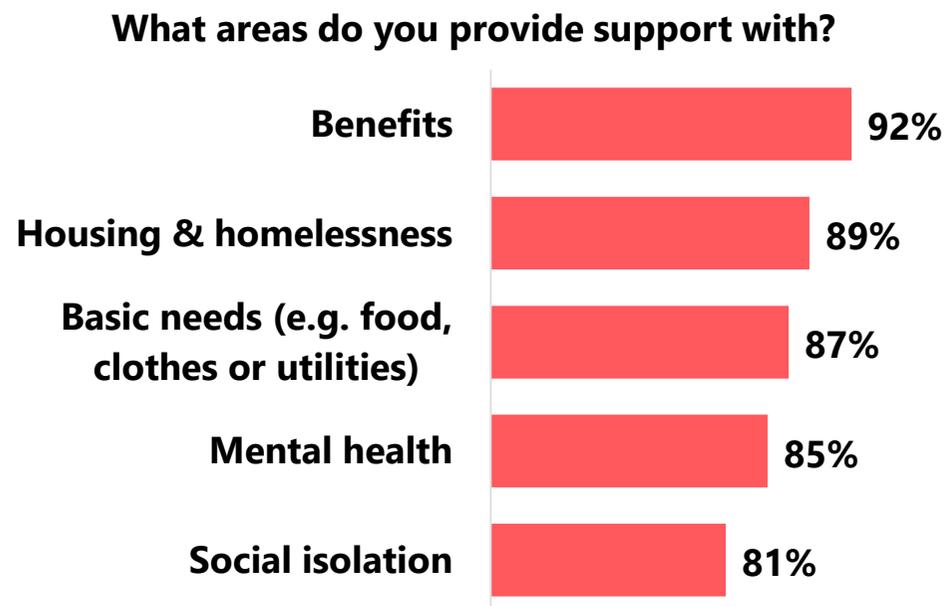


# INTRODUCTION

Each of the Help through Crisis (HtC) projects operates in a unique set of circumstances. In response, every project has developed a delivery model to resolve crisis that meets the needs of the people and the place they are based in. For example, in some areas the cost of housing is very high, making it difficult for people to afford to pay their rent. While in other areas, the cost of housing is much lower but there are few employment opportunities, making it difficult for people to find work. In both cases, people may struggle to make ends meet, though the kind of support needed will differ.

Although the causes and nature of crises vary across the country, there are common themes which cut across the HtC programme. Projects are often seeking to address multiple needs and provide person-centred support to resolve a crisis situation:

- Almost all of the projects involved in HtC provide support with **financial hardship** (92%) helping people to navigate the benefits system, meet their basic needs, and manage their finances.
- Just under 90% of projects (89%) help people with their **housing needs**. For example, finding suitable accommodation for people who are homeless, accessing housing benefits and adapting people's homes.
- Most projects (85%) are providing support to people with **mental health needs**, by signposting to or providing counselling services.
- Many projects are also helping to combat **social isolation** (81%) by connecting people with others in their community through social clubs, befriending and peer support.



Source: [Partnership Mapping Tool](#), 2018, Base: 53

These are not the only causes of crisis projects are tackling. Projects also support people facing domestic abuse, legal problems, substance misuse, asylum or immigration issues and many other causes of crisis. However, we have chosen to focus on the themes above as they are the most common across the HtC programme. This learning paper contains a chapter on each of these themes. It brings together case study examples of how HtC projects have addressed each cause of crisis – whether through partnership working, wrap-around delivery models or involving people with lived experience.

# BACKGROUND

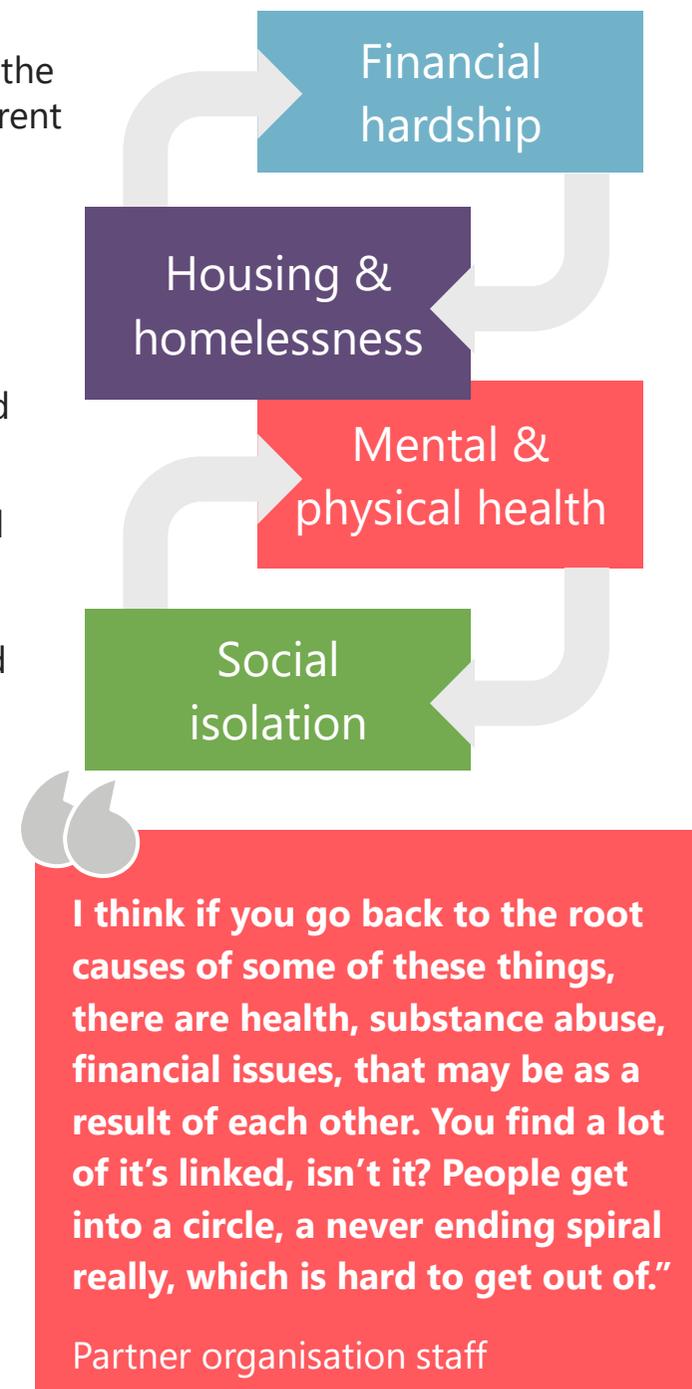
The causes of crisis are complex, varied and interlinked. A literature review in Year 1 of the programme set out two main views of the underlying causes of hardship crisis and current thinking on the most effective ways of addressing these:

- 1. Hardship is a result of personal factors and best tackled at the individual level.** This approach focuses on individual factors such as debt or substance misuse that may contribute to a person experiencing a recurrence of hardship. Effective responses require a targeted, individual level response which seeks to build personal resilience and considers how to bring about context specific and appropriate behavioural change.
- 2. Hardship is the result of systemic problems and best tackled at the overall system level.** This approach focuses on the structural factors creating the conditions for hardship crisis to flourish e.g. welfare cuts and social inequality. Effective responses focus on influencing policy or legislative change that would address the underlying causes of hardship.

The literature suggests that there is often a complex interplay between a person's individual circumstances and adverse structural factors outside their direct control. As a result, it is important to recognise that the causes of and responses to crisis are not mutually exclusive.

This learning paper provides short case study examples to demonstrate some of the approaches used to address the underlying causes of hardship crisis. These focus on projects that are seeking to change the structural causes of crisis, and those that are supporting individuals to change their personal circumstances.

You can find a more detailed summary of the literature in the [Year 1 literature review](#).



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FINANCIAL  
HARDSHIP

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# FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Large numbers of people access support through HtC projects because they are struggling with debt, cannot afford the basic essentials such as food, clothes or utilities or need help accessing benefits.

The causes of financial hardship in the UK include structural causes associated with the welfare system, inequality and poverty. Individual factors also play a role, including low literacy or digital skills, lack of English language abilities, awareness of existing rights, financial knowledge and poor health. Support often focuses on:

## Support to meet immediate needs

For example, providing food vouchers or access to food banks and baby banks, help to pay bills and travel expenses, or access to a hardship fund.

## Personal finance management

This could include helping people to manage their money, agree sustainable approaches to paying off debt or finding better deals for their regular bills.

## Navigating the benefits system

For example, advocacy through attending meetings and benefits tribunals, help managing the appeals process, and ongoing case work including reminders of appointments.

**I went to the job centre. I thought, this has got to be easy. I say hello, they reply 'just log on.' I don't know anything about computers. You start falling behind."**

Service user

**It all stems back to debt. Most of [the people we work with] have some degree of debt, poor budgeting, coping skills."**

Lead partner staff

In addition to providing financial hardship support at an individual level, HtC projects are also working to address the structural causes of financial hardship. Some HtC projects work to influence system level changes through campaigning both locally and nationally to ensure that the benefits system works better for the people who need it.

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# BUILDING FINANCIAL SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Many of the individuals the Cambridge Crisis Network (CCN) works with have faced some form of financial crisis. CCN provides ongoing support to manage debt and budgeting beyond an immediate crisis. They work with people in a number of ways to build skills, confidence and long-term resilience to enable them to cope with future financial challenges. Their work includes:

- Delivering **financial capability training sessions** in local food banks to build skills and identify people who might be suitable for more intensive support provided through the HtC project.
- **Case workers agreeing realistic individual actions** with people focusing on identifying small steps that individuals can complete away from the project base. Case workers see individuals frequently, and spend time supporting them by email and phone, while encouraging people to take actions on their own. The intention is to build confidence and resilience by taking one step at a time.

Across their work, CCN uses a range of approaches to build budgeting skills and financial confidence. They take a flexible approach and seek to keep the information they provide as engaging as possible, as they recognise that people can find talking about finances off-putting or uncomfortable. This includes sharing magazines containing financial tips like [Quids in](#), which are more accessible and easier to digest.



## Approaches used by the network

**Talking through bills or letters together** and explaining how people can switch providers and shop around. For example, CCN might support people to look for the best energy tariffs, phone tariffs, life insurance or car insurance depending on their needs.

Discussing incomings and outgoings to **develop a spending plan**. The CCN team provides people with a spending diary (designed by a volunteer at Citizens Advice) that individuals can use to keep track of everything they spend money on.



Suggesting people **take out a small amount of money at the start of the week** to keep in their wallet. They can use this money to make purchases throughout the week, making it easier to keep track of how much they have spent based on what is in their wallet.

# INFLUENCING SYSTEM LEVEL CHANGES

Z2K (Zaccheus 2000 Trust) is an anti-poverty charity which seeks to tackle social security issues. Z2K is involved in the Stepping Stones to Stability project, based in London, and has run several campaigns to influence local and national policy. These were designed to make the benefits system easier to navigate by asking the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to make some specific changes. One campaign, involving an online petition, led DWP to revise their advice to GPs about writing fit notes for people waiting for benefits tribunals. Another campaign involved Z2K and a consortium of other charities making a complaint to the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) which led to the ASA deeming that the DWP's Universal Credit advertising campaign in The Metro was 'misleading'. More detail on the campaign can be found via this [link](#).

The campaigns led by Z2K have improved the experiences of people facing financial hardship by changing the context individuals and organisations have to operate within. The team recommend the following factors when designing a campaign:

## Focusing on lived experience

Grounding the campaigns in lived experience was hugely important for Z2K. Doing so helps to mobilise campaigns quickly by drawing on the wealth of insights and knowledge held by those with lived experience. It also makes a campaign highly relevant and creates better traction with audiences by bringing the issues to life.

***I know what the problems are. Most people know what the problems are. But it's not our voice that people are interested in."***

Partner organisation staff

## Fast-paced, reactive approach

Being flexible and reacting to emerging issues seen during daily casework can be more effective than having a 'fixed plan'. A responsive approach ensures that campaigns are dealing with the most pressing issues. Situations and policies can change quickly, so a reactive approach enables campaigns to adapt to what is happening on the ground.

***Any organisation that campaigns should be mindful that it may not all be planned. We are small and for that reason we can be reactionary to things. This makes sure we are fighting for what is affecting our clients right now."***

Partner organisation staff

## Partnership working

Working together in partnership brings a unified voice to a campaign which is often more powerful than a campaign led by a single organisation. It can also add credibility by bringing together the expertise and knowledge of multiple organisations. This may make messages harder to ignore.

***We shouldn't always campaign alone. We should have a unified voice on disability benefits and the assessment process, and really include clients from each organisation."***

Partner organisation staff

There are more tips on bringing about system change in the [messages and tactics for influencing toolkit](#)

# 2

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

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# HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

A wide range of partnerships are providing help to address people's housing problems. This includes specialist organisations that solely work with people facing housing difficulties and homelessness, as well as organisations providing wide ranging advice and support. Many of the people facing financial difficulties, mental or physical health problems and social isolation or family breakdown also face challenges associated with securing and maintaining a stable home.

There is some consensus among experts such as [Shelter](#)<sup>1</sup> that structural factors are the underlying cause of homelessness. The main structural factors leading to homelessness are the availability of affordable private and social housing stock and the availability of housing benefits for those who need them.

In addition, Shelter and others recognise that social and personal factors may also contribute to homelessness, even if this is not the underlying cause:

- Social factors: Unstable family situations and institutional experiences such as having been in care or spent time in prison can make it more difficult for people to attain and maintain housing.
- Personal factors: A lack of qualifications, a lack of social support networks, difficulties with debt (especially mortgage or rent arrears) and health conditions can all make it harder for people to compete in the housing market.

Partnerships described how young people are particularly at risk of homelessness due to housing benefit changes, drug and alcohol problems and the breakdown of family relationships.

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**It is all integrated. They have a housing problem because they have a debt problem because they have a benefit problem."**

Lead partner staff

**People don't understand different types of housing tenure, housing associations, private rented sectors, local housing allowance, what benefits they would or wouldn't be entitled to."**

Partner organisation staff

**Now rent is paid upfront rather than in arrears, so they're always on the back foot. Deductions are coming from their Universal Credit and I see their deductions and ring up to say this is putting people into hardship."**

Lead partner staff

<sup>1</sup> Shelter *What causes homelessness?* Retrieved 24 March 2020: [https://england.shelter.org.uk/support\\_us/campaigns/what\\_causes\\_homelessness](https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/what_causes_homelessness)

# DROP-IN SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Key, which is part of the People in Crisis project in Lancashire, provides a drop-in service covering two towns in Lancashire. The drop-in is specifically for young people, aged 16-25, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The drop-in offers an entry point for young people to access services including support to resolve challenges related to their housing situation and wider advice. The drop-in is well known amongst young people in the area and is seen as a safe place to spend time.

The service uses a self-referral approach – anyone from the relevant age bracket can come along to the centre. Staff at the centre described how the informal and unthreatening nature of the drop-in service helps to keep young people engaged. The project also provides an email helpline which enables people who wouldn't feel comfortable going to the centre in person to reach out for support.

Following a referral, the project seeks to co-develop a tailored plan with each individual based on their needs, which helps to encourage people to take ownership of their plan. This involves understanding the circumstances of each individual and having a conversation with the person which is realistic about what they can work towards and makes clear their responsibilities. If relevant the project will also provide information about an individual's housing rights. Once a plan is drawn up, if appropriate, the project will refer individuals onto other organisations who can provide further support. This includes referring young people to the Housing Options Team Leader based in the council who works closely with the Children's Social Care team.

One of the main aims of the project is to support young people to get back in touch and improve relationships with their family and carers. This often involves mediation with parents or relatives to try and improve their living situation and home environment. If the mediation is unsuccessful, the project will discuss with the young person what other options they may have, and how best to proceed.

Once someone has been supported into accommodation, the project will then provide informal long-term support, encouraging the young person to continue attending the drop-in centre.



**They were there for me whenever I needed, even if it was just to rant and get stuff out of my system... They have helped me get this far, just think where they can get me to in the future."**

Service user



**They can just carry on attending the drop-in, that is always open to them. The door is always open for them to come back."**

Partner organisation staff

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# SUPPORTING TENANTS AND LANDLORDS

The Bond Board provides bespoke housing support to people in Rochdale. The project is designed for people who are assessed as not eligible for social housing and therefore require support maintaining a private tenancy. It does this through a two-strand approach: 1) assisting people who are struggling to maintain their tenancy and 2) directly supporting landlords to help provide opportunities for tenants struggling in the privately rented sector (PRS). This two-strand approach aims to change the housing system in the local area by encouraging landlords to provide housing to people facing homelessness.

## Building relationships with tenants

It can be difficult for people who are unable to get social housing to find a home in the PRS. Some landlords may discriminate against tenants who receive housing benefits to pay their rent, while others may be concerned about an individual's lifestyle or ability to pay.

To try and get people back into stable housing, the Bond Board adopts a personalised approach which involves 1:1 support and the development of individual plans. This provides individuals with the opportunity to input as much as they feel able to. It is vital to build a relationship so that there is mutual trust between the service and the person accessing support. Emphasising that staff are on their side can help with this.

## Building relationships with landlords

The Bond Board has developed strong relationships with landlords in the area. They have a database of landlords who are happy to house people the Bond Board works with, enabling the project to signpost tenants directly to these landlords. They also provide Bond Guarantees – a written contract between the Bond Board, the tenant and the landlord. A Bond Guarantee provides a commitment that the Bond Board will pay the landlord up to a certain amount when someone leaves the tenancy if there is damage, rent arrears or theft. The Bond Guarantee replaces a cash bond or deposit paid by the tenant, helping those who do not have cash available to move into a new home.

The ongoing support provided to tenants was also felt to improve landlords' trust in their tenants, which can lead to landlords being more likely to agree to provide housing to people who have had difficulties maintaining a tenancy in the past. A complementary approach which has been delivered by some local authorities is to offer landlords financial support with repairs and legal fees to decrease the potential risk to landlords of taking on tenants who have previously struggled to maintain housing.



**“It's not just about independence, but how you build that independence and those relationships.”**

Lead partner staff

**“The landlords are a lot less likely to take action against the client and give you time to do some work with them.”**

Lead partner staff

# 3

## MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

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# MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Mental and physical health problems often interact with the other causes of crisis described in this learning paper. This may mean that individuals who experience mental or physical health problems are more likely to fall into a crisis situation.

Facing a crisis situation is also likely to have an impact on someone's health and wellbeing, potentially causing stress, anxiety and depression. For example, social isolation and loneliness, poverty and debt, and homelessness and poor housing are all listed by [Mind](#)<sup>2</sup> as factors that can potentially result in a period of poor health.

Partnerships report how it can take a long time for people to receive medical help for mental health problems, describing particularly long waiting lists for mental health support and counselling in some areas. These delays may increase the likelihood of someone facing a crisis situation as they are unable to get the help they need quickly enough. There may also be limits on the number of counselling sessions someone is eligible for via their GP which can add to the strain.

While mental health problems are often a key focus for HtC projects, physical health can also contribute to crises. For example, spending a prolonged period of time in hospital or having a physical disability may lead to social isolation and exacerbate mental health problems.

Reflecting the link between health and crisis, some partnerships conduct outreach work in GP surgeries or hospital wards as a way of identifying those needing support. Close relationships with medical staff can also help, for example through referrals.

<sup>2</sup> Mind (2017) *Mental health problems – an introduction* Retrieved 24 March 2020: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-problems-introduction/causes/>

**Me not eating properly, not washing properly, it was just an everyday thing, I didn't think it was a problem because it was how I lived life."**

Service user

**95% of my clients have mental health problems without fail. . . I have yet to receive a client who has discussed it with their GP . . . So if you have a mental health issue, where do you go? . . . We have two mental health charities [in the area] and both those organisations are now having to deal with housing issues only."**

Lead partner staff

**There are some people with multiple barriers [in life]. They might have a learning disability...they may also have a physical disability and be far more likely to be in isolation."**

Partner organisation staff

# PARTNERING WITH HOSPITALS

The WELLcome Home project is a partnership between Birmingham Mind and Shelter. It provides support to individuals and families in hospital to help them to reconnect with their accommodation and community after a stay as an inpatient. Birmingham Mind works with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust to support patients to return to the community. Shelter works with Birmingham Women's Hospital and Birmingham Children's Hospital to support the families of poorly children to make their homes suitable to return to after a child has been unwell.

The organisations have forged strong relationships with the hospitals through:

- Regular ward meetings, bed meetings and multi-disciplinary team meetings at the hospitals to understand the needs of patients and identify how the WELLcome Home project can help.
- Peer mentors who build ongoing relationships with patients and their families, building trust and providing emotional support before and after discharge. This also helps to bring the experiences of the patient to the forefront of their care as peer mentors act as an advocate on their behalf including during meetings with doctors.

This approach enables Mind and Shelter to start working with patients before they have been discharged from hospital, giving them early access to help resolve a potential crisis. The approach also means the project can focus on the strengths of each partner organisation, with Shelter bringing significant expertise in the housing system, alongside Mind's knowledge of mental health and wellbeing.

The project has also built a collaborative relationship with the housing team in the local council, which enables housing applications to be fast-tracked where there is a housing need for someone waiting to be discharged from hospital. This is helping to make the overall system in Birmingham work more effectively, supporting people on the brink of crisis by providing them with more immediate support.

Access Dorset is collaborating with a ward in Bournemouth Hospital that supports patients who have suffered from acute liver disorders due to substance misuse. Access Dorset's crisis support workers visit the patient in hospital while they are receiving treatment or on the day of their discharge. The crisis support worker starts to build a relationship with the patient and discusses the type of support they can offer. They also arrange transport and accompany the patient to the Town Hall at the point of discharge, supporting them to access emergency accommodation or wider services by advocating on their behalf. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of repeat patients who have been referred to Access Dorset.



**I supported several of his important meetings by speaking with him beforehand to make note of the things he wanted to express, and prompt him during the meetings with his clinical team."**

Peer mentor



**About 95% patients that we refer to the HtC project, we don't see again, it is incredible. The project supports them until they are sorted."**

Partner hospital staff

# REACHING OUT THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS

MindOut is a Brighton based charity who lead the LGBTQ Urgent Need Advocacy Service project. MindOut provide online support to the LGBTQ community. This was set up almost seven years ago, after the organisation learnt that the people who use their service struggled most with their mental health during the evenings and weekends when other services were shut. In response, they set up an online instant messaging service which is led by volunteers and provides confidential, non-judgmental and anonymous advice and support. The service is open daily, out of hours including weekends and evenings.

Grindr is the world's largest social networking app for gay, bi-sexual, trans, and queer people. The experience of MindOut staff working with people who use Grindr suggests that some people who use the app can feel lonely and isolated and are looking for support with an issue, a mental health concern or a crisis situation.

On Grindr, a pop up about MindOut's online service comes up every few weeks on a user's screen. This has raised awareness about the service, increased the number of people going to MindOut's website, and enabled them to provide support to more people in need. Advertising on Grindr allows MindOut to reach people who:

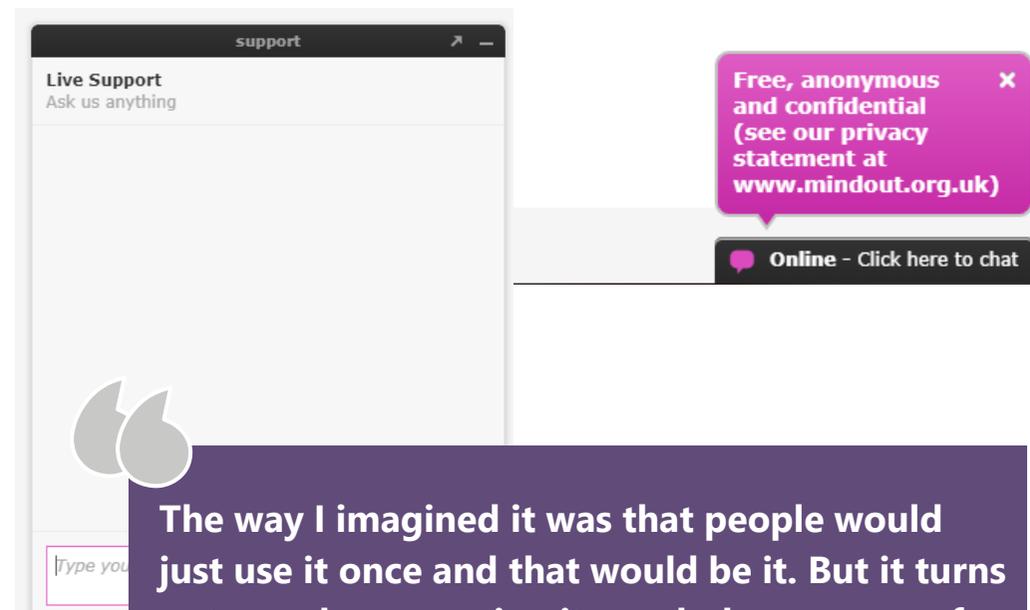
- Don't necessarily have or consider themselves to have a mental health issue
- Aren't identifying as LGBTQ - for example, men who have sex with men who don't identify as gay or bi-sexual

These are groups that may be unaware of MindOut and therefore unlikely to visit their website or the centre. The project has found the online partnership is a powerful way of reaching out to these new groups. People can be referred to further support from MindOut including signposting and case work via the online chats.

## Online Support

We are now online for LGBTQ Mental Health support and information until 7.30pm.

When we are online, you can contact one of our Online Support Workers in confidence for instant chat - see the box in the bottom right hand corner.



**The way I imagined it was that people would just use it once and that would be it. But it turns out people were using it regularly, as a way of checking in, or when they felt a particular way they knew it was there to help them and use as a resource to manage their mental health."**

Lead partner staff

# 4

## SOCIAL ISOLATION

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# SOCIAL ISOLATION

People may become socially isolated for a wide range of reasons. This includes the nature of where they live, poor transport connections, their lifestyle including working arrangements, their age, family breakdown and bereavement. As such, the causes of social isolation are often complex and can differ considerably between individuals.

The absence of a network of family and friends may make it harder for people to cope with a crisis situation or changing life events. Without a strong support system, some people may find it difficult to respond to challenging circumstances such as financial hardship, family breakdown or problems with their housing situation. They may not be able to rely on financial or emotional support from those around them that could help them get through a difficult time. In this way, social isolation may lead to a crisis as people have less of a safety net to fall back on.

Conversely, living in crisis may also result in social isolation as individuals find it difficult to build relationships or distance themselves from existing social connections. Rebuilding these links and finding opportunities to reconnect people with their communities is a key part of many HtC projects. This includes providing befriending services, creating social spaces and hubs and developing peer support approaches where people with lived experience help others facing related challenges.

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**Do they have a support system in place? A client was quite ill and needed a next of kin phone number for the ambulance. The only number he could give was for his case worker. Our case workers are equivalent to their family."**

Lead partner staff

**Some are care leavers, so if they have no family or people who can provide them with accommodation, they come to us. . . There are obviously messy family relations, if not gone completely, and they have limited support."**

Partner organisation staff

**Sometimes what people are referred for is not actually the real issue. Underlying all our referrals is this current theme of social isolation . . . People didn't have an effective support network, so when something happened there was no-one there to help them address that and so a small issue became a big problem."**

Lead partner staff

# BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER THROUGH PEER SUPPORT

Mencap Liverpool & Sefton provides a space for people to come together as a community. People with lived experience who have been coming to Mencap Liverpool & Sefton are thought of inclusively as 'members' of the organisation. As well as providing support with day to day challenges, the project puts on regular activities and social meetings for members. The organisation works to overcome social isolation and exclusion with a strong focus on co-production.

## Reducing social isolation

To help reduce social isolation, a 'buddy system' is in place. This involves pairing up someone with lived experience who has been going to the centre for a long time with a new member. The 'buddy' facilitates the induction for the new member and provides longer term support to encourage them to stay engaged, for example by sending reminders of events and social meetings. This was felt to work effectively as members can often identify better with each other and it removes the power dynamic of 'staff' and 'beneficiary'. The buddy system was also felt to improve the confidence, social skills and leadership skills of the buddy.

## Addressing social exclusion

Mencap Liverpool & Sefton adopts the philosophy that overcoming stereotypes of people with learning disabilities can only change through community integration and understanding others' stories and experiences. For this reason they aim to give their members as many opportunities as possible to go out and tell their stories. In so doing, Mencap Liverpool & Sefton hopes to reduce social exclusion within the community.

Learning disability training is delivered by people with lived experience to companies. The training aims to educate organisations on issues which people with learning disabilities face. By being visible and going out and delivering training they hope to encourage social inclusion by breaking down stigma about people with learning disabilities. This in turn may encourage organisations to think differently and provide more opportunities for people with learning disabilities in the future, thus changing the local context.

Mencap Liverpool & Sefton also works to be inclusive of people from BAME and LGBTQ+ communities, as people with a learning disability from marginalised groups often face additional barriers. Staff view the organisation as a charity fighting for equality, more than a 'disability organisation'.

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**My family fell out with me. I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I didn't come here. It's like family."**  
Service user

**We undo our hard work of pushing for equality if we speak for [people with learning disabilities]. This is one of the reasons we get the members to lead the training."**  
Lead partner staff

# INFORMAL WAYS TO GET TOGETHER

Billingham and Stockton Borough Foodbank is part of the Stockton HtC project. The organisation runs foodbanks in several parts of the town, helping people with their immediate food needs. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the foodbanks provided a space for people to come back to the centres and have a coffee, even if they no longer required help accessing food.

As an organisation, Billingham and Stockton Borough Foodbank had seen a significant number of men coming back to their centres as a way of connecting with other people. Often these men had experienced a breakdown in their marriage or had been widowed and found themselves socially isolated. This included men who were looking after their children on their own and might not have had the company of family and friends their age. The foodbank was exploring the possibility of developing activities specifically for men at times when the foodbank was closed to other people as a way of supporting this group.

The foodbank also offered volunteering opportunities as an effective way to keep in touch with people, even if just for a few weeks. For example, one person with lived experience of crisis started volunteering with the foodbank for the companionship. She started attending school fairs and assemblies with foodbank staff to raise awareness of what they do. She also provided advice to people coming to the foodbank, drawing on her own lived experience of crisis. Through the process, she made friends and this has helped support her mental health and increase the stability in her life.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Billingham and Stockton Borough Foodbank has had to change their work. At the time of writing, they have had to limit the number of volunteers due to social distancing measures and are in the planning stages of changing how they operate. Looking forward, it is likely they will focus on food distribution as their main priority rather than providing wider activities in the community given the level of need.



**Where do they find someone to talk to? Men are often more withdrawn than women."**

Partner organisation staff



**I can relate to people, I can show them empathy, and be understanding towards them and listen. I can relate back to that, because that's exactly how I was at the beginning."**

Volunteer and former service user

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# 5

## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

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# ENABLING FACTORS TO TACKLE THE CAUSES OF CRISIS

The examples in this learning paper illustrate some of the ways HtC projects are addressing the complex and interlinked causes of crisis. This includes approaches being tackled at the individual level such as 1:1 support and individual action plans, as well as approaches being tackled at the system level including campaigns and local partnership working. Although the projects are using different approaches to tackle different themes, we have identified two common enabling factors that have contributed to their success.

**1. Working effectively with a variety of partners**

**2. Embedding lived experience**



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# 1. Working effectively with a variety of partners

Working effectively with a variety of partners helps to:

- Provide **joined-up support to individuals** in crisis who may have complex and multiple needs and therefore require holistic support. The need to provide holistic and varied support often becomes evident during initial contact. As they outline their wider situation, individuals may address issues beyond the immediate reasons why they approached the service such as a lack of food, or needing support with a benefits application. Projects have built a wide network of complementary organisations with different specialisms to help address multiple needs, for example working with local housing teams in the council to help young people find housing.
- **Reach a wide range of people facing crisis** by connecting with partners that work with different groups and collaborating with organisations to raise awareness of a project. Examples in this paper include working with local food banks to identify those potentially in need and collaborating with online apps to signpost people towards a service.
- **Influence systems change** by giving campaigns or new delivery approaches greater credibility and power, drawing on the expertise of a range of different organisations. Developing new ways of working together that lead to enhanced service provision may also change local systems and enable better crisis support at the time and the place it is needed. Examples in this paper include working closely with hospitals or with landlords in the privately rented sector.



Who could the project work with in the area that it is not already connected to?



How can organisations collectively improve support to individuals?



How could the project help them? And how could they help the project?



What could organisations do together to influence the systemic causes of crisis in the area?

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## 2. Embedding lived experience

Embedding lived experience helps to:

- Provide **opportunities for individuals to stay involved** in a project beyond an immediate crisis. For example, creating volunteering opportunities for people who have used a service, or gathering feedback to shape how support is delivered to others. Volunteers with lived experience bring empathy and understanding to frontline delivery, for example, via the running of informal support such as drop-in centres. This can help to maintain engagement with people, building resilience over the longer term. Examples in this paper include building volunteer pathways to enable people to provide peer support and creating a buddy system.
- Working with people with lived experience **as part of awareness raising or influencing activities** increases the relevance of the work and helps to bring content to life. This can increase the effectiveness of these approaches, giving them more sticking power that may result in systemic changes. For example, approaches that amplify the voices of those with lived experience and provide opportunities for decision makers to hear their views can be a powerful way of encouraging change. Examples in this paper include involving people with lived experience in providing the content for campaigns and getting involved in delivering training sessions to local businesses.



How could people with lived experience be further involved in the project's work?



How could the service provide informal ways for people to come together?



Are there opportunities to support people in volunteering roles?



What steps could the project take to support people with lived experience to influence the issues that matter to them?

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# WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER RESOURCES

A variety of additional complementary resources are available on the [HtC Google Drive](#) which provide further information about partnership working and different approaches that can be used to embed lived experience within a project:

## Working with partners

- The [partnership working](#) learning paper summarises some of the key elements of effective partnership working including: co-operation, flexibility and communication
- The [reaching out learning paper](#) explores how projects can reach people through other organisations and make the most of referrals by having clear criteria and building relationships with partners
- Get in touch with the LSE team if you'd like to discuss partnership working further: [HelpthroughCrisis@Ipsos.com](mailto:HelpthroughCrisis@Ipsos.com)

## Embedding lived experience

- The [co-production toolkit](#) includes lots of resources related to embedding lived experience including [a guide to developing peer support and groups](#)
- The [working with beneficiaries](#) learning paper provides examples of how HtC projects are involving people in different ways including gathering feedback, setting up user groups and having an influence on services
- The [beneficiary to volunteer transition](#) literature scan summarises the evidence related to how people with lived experience can be supported as volunteers
- Get in touch with Andy at Revolving Doors Agency for one to one support: [andy.williams@revolving-doors.org.uk](mailto:andy.williams@revolving-doors.org.uk)

The [messages and tactics for influencing toolkit](#) also provides tips on how to work with partners and involve those with lived experience to effectively communicate key messages.

# THANK YOU!

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*The People in Crisis project in Lancashire*

*The #WhatHelpedMe project*

*Homeless Advice & Resilience Project*

*Stockton Help through Crisis project*

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If you have any comments or questions about any of the issues discussed in this paper, please get in touch with the Learning, Support and Evaluation team using the email address below, or via the Slack platform.



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