



# Adapting in adversity

**Delivering services to people experiencing multiple disadvantage during Covid-19**

Emilie Smeaton, Rowan Boase, Sarah Cheshire and Lynne Tinsley

## **Summary of key evidence, learning and insight relating to partnerships and projects' response to people experiencing multiple disadvantage in Covid-19**

Evidence, learning and insights about the Covid-19 pandemic from across Fulfilling Lives, Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) and Help through Crisis (HtC) has identified the following key themes and issues relating to the impact and response to the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects are effectively providing rapid responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. While there have been challenges, partnerships are, to quote the Fulfilling Lives evaluation team, undertaking 'natural experiments' to adapt their approaches and service delivery. In some cases, this is leading to increased reach and new ways of working, some of which partnerships and projects intend to continue once the Covid-19 pandemic ends. Operating within the pandemic is bringing 'new clients' who have not previously accessed crisis support services. However, there is also concern about those that partnerships have not been able to reach.
- Working in partnership with statutory and third sector agencies is a thread throughout the report and highlighted in the case study illustrating the provision of accommodation for disadvantaged women. Partnership working is crucially important in responding to the pandemic and meeting the needs of beneficiaries.
- Continuing to deliver services during the pandemic impacts on staff wellbeing. While partnerships and projects across the three programmes are taking steps to address this, staff wellbeing remains an important area of focus. This focus will play a part in both protecting individual staff and ensuring they continue to effectively support beneficiaries. Recognition of vicarious trauma<sup>1</sup>, and application of trauma informed approaches, can support with staff wellbeing alongside meeting the needs of beneficiaries.
- Partnerships and projects have been attentive to meeting basic needs. The concept of what constitutes basic needs has been extended to include daily access to medication to manage substance use, prevention or reduction of isolation and ensuring people are linked in to support and information via phone or computer equipment. Partnerships and projects have identified both benefits and challenges relating to online and phone support. There are concerns about those who are digitally excluded including: those affected by poverty, particularly BAME women and girls; older people; those partnerships find difficult to engage on a face-to-face basis; and new clients.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vicarious trauma takes place in an individual as a result of empathic engagement with traumatised individuals and reports of their traumatic experiences.

- The national focus upon providing accommodation to the homeless has provided both successes and challenges for partnerships from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC. Their experiences illustrate how ‘containment’ can be complex and difficult for some, and that successfully ‘housing’ an individual requires understanding and addressing underlying issues and meeting additional needs. Once again, a trauma informed approach supports this.
- There are positive examples of beneficiaries providing peer support and co-producing work with partnerships, highlighting how beneficiaries’ strengths have enabled constructive responses within the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there are some groups of women that appear to be particularly disadvantaged during the pandemic including those who experience, or are at risk of, domestic abuse, mental health issues and/or sexual abuse. In many cases, pre-existing disadvantage has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

# 1. Introduction

This report presents evidence, learning and insight from across Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC<sup>2</sup>. It addresses challenges faced by partnerships and projects, and their beneficiaries, along with steps and solutions taken to respond to Covid-19. As the report content focus upon the experiences of partnerships and projects working to adapt and deliver services to those facing multiple disadvantage<sup>3</sup>, the report is intended to be relevant for the following audiences:

- Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects
- evaluation and learning teams supporting the partnerships and projects
- The National Lottery Community Fund (The Fund) and other funders
- commissioners, policymakers and service delivery organisations in sectors supporting those facing severe and multiple disadvantages.

## 1.1 Bringing together evidence across three programmes

The Fund has identified an opportunity to bring together evidence, learning and insights about the Covid-19 pandemic from across:

- Fulfilling Lives
- WGI
- HtC.

These programmes support people facing severe and multiple disadvantages who, due to pre-existing inequalities, are particularly at risk of experiencing the negative consequences, and wider implications, of Covid-19. A range of outputs addressing specific research questions will be produced from this cross-cutting work.

## 1.2 Aims of producing evidence across programmes

There are three aims:

- 1) To provide evidence, learning and insight into how grant holders are responding to Covid-19, the successes and challenges they are facing and any solutions to barriers.
- 2) To understand the impact of Covid-19 and its wider implications upon partnerships and projects, and those they support.
- 3). To identify emerging ideas and practices to support communities to thrive as the Covid-19 crisis continues and in its aftermath.

---

<sup>2</sup> Details of each of these programmes and their corresponding evaluation contracts are provided in Appendix 1

<sup>3</sup> People facing multiple disadvantage experience a range of problems including poor mental health, interpersonal violence and abuse, homelessness and substance misuse. They may also fall in the gaps between services and systems.

## **1.3 Content of the report**

The content of the report has come from:

- A Fulfilling Lives evaluation and learning community of practice meeting in April 2020 where partnerships presented work they are planning or taking in response to the Covid-19 pandemic
- A document provided by the Fulfilling Lives evaluation team outlining initial thoughts on national evaluation response to the pandemic
- Information from the WGI Learning and Impact Service team about how WGI grant holders are responding to Covid-19.
- Interviews undertaken by the learning support and evaluation (LSE) team undertaken with 33 out of 49 HtC partnerships whose funding extends beyond 2020 to address: the impact of Covid-19 upon partnerships; challenges they face; steps taken to address challenges; and support needs to inform how the LSE team can provide support.

Alongside describing the evidence, learning and insight from the above activities, the report also presents recommended areas of ongoing support for Fulfilling Live, WGI and HtC to enable them to support communities to thrive throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. The report ends with recognition of the importance in ensuring beneficiaries are directly included in evaluation, learning and insight activity to present their experiences of the pandemic.

## **2. Responses, challenges and solutions**

This section of the report presents detail of how Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects have responded to the pandemic, challenges and steps they have taken to either pre-empt or address challenges.

### **2.1 A rapid response**

Partnerships and projects recognise the importance of providing a rapid response to the pandemic and are quickly developing new processes and ways of delivering services. Some HtC partnerships are finding that this is resulting in increased reach. Reflections from the WGI Learning and Impact Service team highlight how quickly and flexibly the WGI projects have responded to the needs of women and girls. For example, through effective partnership working every vulnerable woman in one county was successfully housed within two weeks of lockdown and provided with a suitable supported package.

### **2.2 Working in partnership**

Partnerships and projects from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC are drawing on existing relationships to work in partnership with both statutory and third sector agencies. One HtC partnership highlighted how, to meet local needs, they are currently focusing their resources upon working with local, rather than national, partners. Another HtC partnership described how they are ‘mucking in’ with local authority responses and contributing by, for example, delivering food and calling people who are isolated. Further examples of working in partnership are provided in section 2.7.

## **2.3 Challenges of remote working**

Due to social distancing requirements, partnerships have moved to remote working. HtC partnerships identified difficulties relating to practicalities such as adjusting to video technologies, additional costs incurred in providing staff with mobile phones and other equipment and maintaining effective communication between staff. The lack of opportunity to carry out face-to-face work has led to increased workloads. For example, one HtC partnership described being presently unable to continue with group work. This means staff conduct numerous phone conversations in place of one group conversation. Partnerships and projects across Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC are all calling service users more regularly to explain, for example, the threat of Covid-19, where to go for food and other necessities. This is time-consuming and has increased the workload of some staff.

## **2.4 Reach, referrals and variation across types of need and access routes**

There is a mixed picture in relation to referrals for those requiring support. Many WGI projects have remained open to new referrals but have noted a reduction in number. Projects are very aware that those perpetrating abuse are likely to be present a lot of the time and able to control women's movements and access to technology.

While some HtC partnerships have not witnessed an immediate increase in the numbers of people requiring support, some have seen a rapid increase in the number being referred to their service. For example, one partnership has seen a threefold increase in people requiring parcels from the foodbank. Another has seen a 260% increase in referrals to their organisation.

### **New people are seeking support**

One HtC partnership is seeing 'new' people come into their services: those who have been employed, are furloughed and/or are new to the benefits system. It is reflected that these people are often more capable of taking action for themselves than many of the clients the partnership traditionally works with. Increased demand has meant some partnerships have had to prioritise people most in need.

### **Partnerships want to extend their reach but are also concerned about 'mission creep'**

One HtC partnership is acutely aware that there are some in the community that support services are not presently reaching and has taken the approach of drawing upon the individual networks of its staff team to identify and increase reach. HtC partnerships are worried about not being able to support everyone who has been referred or contacted them for support. As the Covid-19 crisis grows, some partnerships anticipate that there could be 'mission creep' where they are supporting an increasingly wider group of people with different needs.

## **2.5 Focus on meeting individuals' needs**

### **Supporting basic needs**

Many partnerships contributing to the Fulfilling Lives and HtC programmes have adapted their service delivery within the Covid-19 pandemic to meet beneficiaries'

basic needs. This includes access to food by providing food parcels or food deliveries, delivering medication and carrying out welfare checks.

### **Helping people stay connected**

Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects are also keenly aware of how the Covid-19 pandemic can create or increase isolation and have been ensuring regular contact with those where isolation is a risk or experienced.

As part of ensuring people's basic needs are met, partnerships and projects from the three programmes have taken steps to ensure those they support have access to phones. There are examples of services providing cheap phones and/or sim cards and phone credit.

### **Supporting safe drug or alcohol use**

There is recognition of the importance of supporting people with drug and/or alcohol use who may have specific needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Fulfilling Lives partnerships are working in partnership with drug services to support people on controlled medications who are self-isolating by safely collecting their medication from the pharmacy. One Fulfilling Lives partnership has developed a protocol to aid decision-making regarding how this support should take place. Within the WGI, there are concerns about the risks for women on a methadone programme being moved to fortnightly prescriptions. Projects are working with health services to maintain daily access.

### **Ensuring people have accurate information about Covid-19**

For WGI projects working with those with poor literacy, English as a second language or those who tend to get information only from peers and social media, there has been an important role in countering misinformation/rumours and providing more accurate information about Covid-19. Similarly, one HtC partnership is regularly calling clients with learning disabilities to ensure they understand government guidance and have information about where to go for food and support.

## **2.6 Providing support online and by telephone**

### **Pre-existing digital capacity has helped where it exists**

The majority of support provided across the three programmes has been moved to online via platforms such as Zoom or Skype or through telephone. Services with a dedicated IT team and/or had pre-existing digital capability have unsurprisingly been in a strong position from the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic to move support online. For example, some WGI projects had previously received funding to provide equipment and rooms for virtual counselling services. Fulfilling Lives partnerships have found that some of those they support have become digitally connected as a result of the pandemic due to being accommodated in hotels or hostels with wifi provision.

### **Online meetings can be more focused**

There have been successes in moving service provision online and using video conferencing to provide one-to-one support or group meetings. One Fulfilling Lives partnership noted how meetings between those with lived experience have benefited

by being more focused. One partnership is making plans to conduct online multi-agency review groups, a core partnership board meeting and an annual learning event.

### **People can have more control over how and when they engage**

From the WGI perspective, moving support online is proving to be effective in terms of checking in and supporting welfare; some women's engagement has increased through virtual access. WGI projects think this is due to women having more control over when and how they make contact. HtC partnerships have similarly drawn on some people's willingness to respond to virtual or phone contact. One partnership intends to maintain its new way of working with phones once the Covid-19 crisis comes to an end due to the success of the approach taken.

### **Digital exclusion means some people can't access support**

Partnerships and projects from WGI and HtC have raised concerns about the digitally excluded being prevented from receiving online support. This can be for reasons relating to: having a device with no online access; the lack of available credit to use the device; or lack of knowledge or experience of navigating online services.

WGI projects are finding that poverty limits access to technology with many, particularly BAME women and girls, not having computers or laptops or being able to afford to put credit on their phone. As noted in point 2.5, steps are taken to provide resources so that individuals have phone credit.

From the perspective of HtC partnership, groups particularly difficult to engage online include: older people with limited digital literacy skills; those whom partnerships find difficult to engage face-to-face; and new clients where there has not been previous opportunity to build a strong relationship.

### **Projects want to learn about how to better include people**

HtC partnerships are interested in sharing learning about how to support the digitally excluded to being online and digitally included. There is also interest in support to consider how partnerships can maintain existing support through communication channels other than phones to enable support to be provided to those who cannot be supported online.

### **Private space, feeling safe and boundaries are important**

WGI projects have found that it can be difficult to provide online therapy due to women and girls not being used to using social media in this way. Many women and girls also lack the private space required for safe and confidential sessions. One project has provided white noise machines to the young women they support to increase privacy. Projects working with young women find themselves constantly messaging, rather than having fixed appointments and time-limited sessions, which makes maintaining boundaries more difficult.

There is concern from some HtC partnerships about the effectiveness of communicating with people they support through video or phone in comparison with face-to-face contact. One partnership described how they felt their previous delivery model based on relationship building and a person-centred approach was not possible without face-to-face contact. They do not feel able to effectively build relationships



over the video or phone. Another partnership echoed these concerns in relation to challenges they experience in relation to providing online or phone support to new clients.

WGI projects also outlined how it is particularly difficult to provide support to women and girls who are in contact for the first time during the pandemic. This is because they are often 'stuck' in their current position and it can be much harder to build the necessary level of trust to enable them to move on. Support has been requested from some HtC partnerships in relation to: working online and: consent; confidentiality; privacy; building trust; and identifying underlying needs.

## **2.7 Provision of accommodation**

### **Provision of emergency accommodation has been a positive step**

While there is concern amongst some HtC partnerships that a hidden population of the homeless community has not been housed, the 'Everyone In' scheme to provide emergency accommodation for homeless people is largely viewed as a positive development. One HtC grantholder described this as a 'golden opportunity' to engage with individuals previously perceived as 'slipping through the net' or 'harder to engage'. This has enabled the partnership to undertake full assessments, thereby facilitating increased understanding of the individual's background and needs, and working with them to assess their options. Some Fulfilling Lives partnerships are supporting the management of the temporary accommodation and maintaining regular contact with those placed in local and out-of-area hotels.

### **Tolerating confinement can be particularly challenging**

While WGI projects are working hard to meet women's accommodation needs and find them somewhere to live, there are those who are not able to tolerate containment because of, for example, past trauma, mental health issues or substance dependency. Some women are back out on the streets and returning to sex work resulting in a few projects having to reactive outreach work.

### **Specialist support has not always been available in emergency accommodation**

While the provision of hotel accommodation for women with accommodation needs is also welcome, evidence and learning from WGI has revealed a lack of support during the night for women who experience panic attacks and/or have self-harmed. In some cases, panic attacks and self-harm has been triggered by having several people with vulnerabilities in one place and the accommodation being mixed in terms of genders. Hotel staff also face additional pressure as they are, understandably, not best placed to respond to some of what they encounter.

The following case study<sup>4</sup> from the WGI illustrates how a range of specialist organisations have responded quickly and effectively to meet the accommodation needs of particularly disadvantaged women in the Covid-19 context:

### **Case study: Women and Girls Initiative**

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, suitable premises were secured for use as emergency temporary housing to provide women with safe accommodation. This was for women who are homeless, or facing homelessness, including rough sleepers, or those in supported accommodation where the service provider was unable to meet public health guidelines regarding Covid-19. This included women experiencing multiple disadvantage including domestic abuse and/or trauma.

Voluntary and statutory agencies were approached to assist. A grantholder and its partner from the Women and Girls Initiative, in partnership with statutory agencies, were tasked with mobilisation, set up and interim management of the accommodation. They developed bespoke training packages addressing trauma responsive practices and domestic violence awareness for all staff, including site security staff. Training packages were initially delivered in one-to-one sessions but subsequently delivered in a virtual online training package to enable access by staff working across shift patterns. In addition, they were able to implement a comprehensive gender-informed support package. The service delivery model incorporated trauma informed approaches to support creation of a safe and secure environment and to avoid further traumatisation.

Factors that facilitated rapid and effective delivery of this provision included: the recognition of the local authority in recognising the specific needs of homeless women; strong partnership working between statutory, voluntary and business sectors, along with local independent shops providing goods; funding from the Mather Family that could be spent on whatever was needed; the expertise about the needs of disadvantaged women held by projects that are part of the WGI programme; and the local authority's recognition of this expertise and their willingness to commit to implementing a trauma response service model.

## **2.8 Peer support**

There is evidence from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC of those with lived experience providing online or WhatsApp peer support for others accessing services. While some WGI peer mentors require additional support in response to the pandemic, there are instances where peer support is a particularly successful element of current provision. Women with lived experience are taking the lead via Facebook and online support groups. One example relates to a craft group co-ordinated by an ex service user where craft projects are shared, and women post online photos of their handiwork. One WGI service have moved their young women's creative writing group online. They are co-

---

<sup>4</sup> Further details relating to this case study and the work of the WGI Learning and Impact Services can be found at: <https://www.tavinstitute.org/news/covid-19-and-the-women-and-girls-initiative/> (accessed on 28/05/20).

producing a Covid-19 ‘herstory’ and the project now includes women in their fifties and sixties sharing stories and support with the teenagers involved.

## **2.9 Disadvantaged groups facing particular high levels of risk**

### **Some women face additional risks**

There is evidence from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC that some disadvantaged groups face particularly high levels of risk. These groups include sex workers and those experiencing domestic abuse.

Traveller women who experience domestic abuse have been identified as being particularly isolated, particularly if they are roadside living or ‘housed’ as they are separated from their community.

The WGI Learning and Impact Service team have identified how some young females are struggling with maintaining lockdown conditions. For some, risk has increased as having broken lockdown conditions provides another barrier to reporting exploitation and other abuse. To add to this, they are not able to access condoms from projects, are thought to be having unprotected sex.

### **Trauma can be re-triggered**

Women with a history or trauma such as domestic or sexual abuse have found that the lockdown situation has re-triggered trauma. As a result, some women have returned to WGI projects for support as the project is a trusted service with whom there is an established relationship.

### **Mental health can be impacted and existing coping strategies may be limited**

Some WGI projects are reporting specific impacts upon mental health including increased self-harm as, in some instances, lockdown has limited women’s coping strategies.

While some young females with high levels of anxiety have found safety in lockdown, there are concerns that some may find it hard to re-engage with education facilities or work when the time comes for them to do so.

## **2.10 Recognising the resilience of disadvantaged groups**

As well as identifying that there are some disadvantaged groups who face particularly high levels of risk during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to note the resilience of some of those supported through the three programmes. One Fulfilling Lives partnership mooted that it is possible that some of their beneficiaries are coping with the Covid-19 pandemic better than some of their staff.

### **Beneficiaries can be skilled at coping in a crisis**

The explanations provided for this relates to how beneficiaries are used to coping with crisis. Many of those supported by the three programmes have previously developed coping strategies that enable them to navigate their way through crisis. The Fulfilling Lives partnership gave the example of those who have been detained in the custodial system and have developed coping mechanisms to manage being forced to spend time in a confined space and in isolation.

This all points to the opportunity to reframe the narrative around those who may be referred to as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘helpless’ by recognising their resilience and ability to cope.

### **2.11 Beneficiary involvement including co-production**

There are a small number of examples of HtC partnerships being able to successfully involve beneficiaries with lived experience in steps to acquire additional funding and co-produce work relating to Council tenant groups. Some HtC partnerships are currently finding it difficult to incorporate co-production in their work. One partnership described co-production activities as having ‘ground to a halt’ due to the time required to respond and adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Fulfilling Lives partnerships have ‘experts by experience’ groups formed of current or past beneficiaries who have previously input into, for example, how services are delivered and influencing wider systems change. Partnerships have reported how engagement is mixed with some beneficiaries presently not engaging. Fulfilling Lives and HtC partnerships want to be able to incorporate co-production activities and are interested in receiving support to enable them to do so remotely.

### **2.12 Impact on staff wellbeing**

Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects have all identified that operating within the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted upon staff wellbeing in numerous ways. Increased workloads stemming from the pandemic are thought to pose challenges for maintaining staff wellbeing. Remote working can negatively impact upon staff wellbeing. While some staff find themselves suited to remote working, others find it challenging.

#### **Concerns for staff privacy**

One HtC partnership is concerned about staff privacy while using video conferencing technology. They are advising staff to make sure their home is kept private by being careful about what and who they show on video, including family members in the background.

#### **Working in isolation from home has emotional effects**

WGI projects have expressed concern about the emotional impact upon staff of working in isolation from home. This relates to staff supporting very vulnerable women and girls in very precarious situations while staff themselves have increased stressors in their lives and less daily support from colleagues. While some staff find themselves suited to remote working, others find it challenging. HtC partnerships have also identified that staff are dealing with challenging issues daily while trying to support beneficiaries. Working at home and addressing such a high level of constant challenges is detrimental to staff wellbeing, not least because these challenging issues are being addressed in staff members’ ‘safe space’, making it more difficult to maintain boundaries around their work.

The lack of contact and support with colleagues is noted across Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC. Some HtC staff have reported missing contact with clients with whom they previously had regular face-to-face contact.

## **Partnerships are focusing on supporting staff wellbeing**

To support staff wellbeing and their work with the people they support, one Fulfilling Lives partnership is providing a blog and webinar to enable staff to continue to work with trauma informed approaches. Another partnership has organised online reflective learning and mindfulness and will continue to develop online sessions for staff to support wellbeing. Both Fulfilling Lives and HtC partnerships have emphasised ensuring an additional focus upon supporting staff through, for example, Microsoft Teams and phone calls.

### **2.13 Volunteering**

Some HtC partnerships have reported an increase in people offering to volunteer. There is concern that it will not be possible to work with these volunteers as partnerships want to follow existing processes relating to training and maintaining safeguarding policies. One partnership has effectively brought in new volunteers at pace by using the telecommunications system Voxivo. This system has been used to conduct group training session and allows volunteers to add staff members to calls with clients if a challenging situation arises.

### **2.14 Concerns about the future/what is to follow**

#### **Increased demand is expected as lockdown ends**

Partnerships from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC are all expecting a surge in demand for their services post lockdown and once the Covid-19 pandemic reduces in severity. HtC partnerships are concerned that the number of people needing support in the coming months may increase dramatically as government measures, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and homelessness support, come to an end. HtC partnerships also described how some of the people they work with may struggle to succeed in a post-Covid-19 world where there may be greater competition for jobs and support. There are also concerns about: increased social isolation during the lockdown leading to more people experiencing crisis; and people with low incomes having increased debts due to stockpiling or a reduction in the number of hours of work available to them.

#### **Concerns about funding and appreciated of flexibility**

HtC partnerships have raised concerns about funding. There is a concern about the extra costs incurred as a result of Covid-19 and a wish to know more about funding streams. Both WGI and HtC also have concerns about securing resources and the lack of longer-term funding to meet additional demands upon services once lockdown restrictions are lifted. Where additional funding has been announced to respond to Covid-19, there is anxiety amongst WGI projects that it will not filter down to small specialist women's organisations. This is despite being the projects that have the knowledge and networks to reach and support the most disadvantaged women and girls coupled with capacity to respond quickly and flexibly. However, WGI projects are particularly appreciative of the support of funders, including the Fund, and their flexibility in enabling them to spend their funding differently in response to Covid-19.

#### **A shared desire to build on successes to create a better future**

Partnerships and projects do not wish to return to ‘normal’ - that is to some of the ways of working and approaches to supporting the disadvantaged in place before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The move towards more flexible working and operating ‘outside of silos’ is recognised as positive alongside the wish to influence systems change. A return to pre-Covid-19 provision to meet the needs of the homeless would also be unwelcome.

## **2.15 Evaluation and learning**

### **Responding to a changed context and needs**

The evaluation and learning teams supporting Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC are working with programme partnerships and projects and the Fund to agree how they can best support with evidence, learning and insights in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. They have already identified plans to address some of the partnerships’ needs outlined in this report.

The Fulfilling Lives evaluators are facilitating more frequent meetings of the Evaluation and Learning community of practice. They are also planning a rapid output to inform planning for transition out of lockdown, as well as a medium-term piece on the impact of changes made during the lockdown and the extent to which these have been maintained.

The WGI Learning and Impact service team are regularly gathering insight from projects about how they are supporting the women and girls they support. They are also gathering learning about responses to particular groups of women and girls.

As highlighted in the introduction to the report, the HtC learning support and evaluation team (LSE) team have undertaken a consultation with staff to understand their needs, responses and challenges. They are developing plans to provide support to partnerships and gather evidence about the impact of the pandemic upon partnerships and those they support. All three evaluation contractors recognise the importance of providing online support including learning events.

### **Using evidence and learning to shape ongoing development**

Learning from what has worked well under lockdown to inform future service development is recognised across the three programmes. For WGI, this learning includes the success of some online support in engaging groups. Several Fulfilling Lives partnerships are undertaking rapid research to inform their ongoing response to the pandemic, for example carrying out regular surveys with staff. One HtC partnership has also identified how they have modified some of their local evaluation questions to capture evidence relating to the changes the partnership has made to service delivery as a result of Covid-19, the major challenges they have faced and what has, and has not, worked.

### **3. Steps to support partnerships and projects**

The report has identified partnerships and projects concerns about meeting demand for services once lockdown ceases and as the wider impacts of Covid-19 continue to materialise. To support with this longer-term concern and service delivery within the context of the pandemic, partnerships and projects have identified areas where they would benefit from further support:

1. Availability of funding in relation to resources to respond to the anticipated increase in demand for services once lockdown ceases and the impact of the pandemic is faced by those partnerships support.
2. Steps to address digital inclusion and widen digital inclusion.
3. Learning to support partnerships to deliver online support for beneficiaries including approaches to privacy, confidentiality and identifying underlying needs.
4. Remote co-production activity.
5. Approaches to work with those who cannot be reached online.

The evidence, learning and insight produced across Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC has led the report authors to identify recommendations for the Fund and programme evaluation and learning teams to support partnerships and projects, and their beneficiaries, to thrive in, and after, the pandemic. These recommendations are:

1. To work with funders to raise their awareness of the smaller specialist organisations who are well versed in understanding and working with people who experience disadvantage to ensure funding opportunities are available to them.
2. To Support and develop a narrative that highlights the resilience, strengths and coping strategies of those practiced in navigating their way through crisis and disadvantage.
3. To consider what support can be put in place to enable staff to adapt existing approaches relating to, for example, building trust-based relationships and taking a person-centred approach to apply to online practice.
4. To capture evidence and learning from those services who deliver face-to-face work during the pandemic to enable others to learn from their approaches and experiences.
5. To identifying additional measures to continue to support staff wellbeing.

### **4. Including beneficiaries' experiences of the Covid-9 pandemic in evaluation, learning and insight activity**

Some partnerships and projects have articulated some of the experiences of those they support. To add to this, there is immense value in hearing directly from beneficiaries about how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted upon them and their views of the services and support they have received through the Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC programmes. It is therefore suggested by the report's authors that evaluation and learning activities include capturing beneficiaries' voices and enable them to directly present their experiences and views about how service delivery can meet their needs.

## **Appendix: Information about Fulfilling Lives, WGI and Help through Crisis**

### **Fulfilling Lives**

[Fulfilling Lives](#) is a £112 million investment over eight years supporting people who experience multiple disadvantage. This is defined as experiencing two or more of the following: homelessness; a record of current or historical offending; substance misuse; and mental health issues.

The programme funds local partnerships in 12 areas across England to test new ways of ensuring individuals receive joined up and person centred services.

The Fund has commissioned CFE Research and The University of Sheffield to carry out [evaluations](#) of the Fulfilling Lives programme to:

- Explore how projects are delivered, understand problems faced and to help identify solutions and lessons to learn
- Track and assess the achievements of the programme to date; and to estimate the extent to which these can be attributed to the programme and the interventions delivered
- Calculate the costs of the projects and the value of benefits to the exchequer and wider society
- Identify what interventions and approaches work well, for which people and in what circumstances
- Assess the extent to which The Fund's principles are incorporated into project design and delivery and to work out the degree to which these principles influence success.

### **Women and Girls Initiative**

The [Women and Girls Initiative](#) is £44.7 million investment supporting 62 projects across England to help and empower women and girls facing a wide range of issues such as violence, abuse, exploitation, and multiple and complex needs. The programme also aims to support development of a stronger sector. The Fund has commissioned Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and partners, DMSS Research and the Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit as a Learning and [Impact service provider to support the women and girls investment](#) to:

- Enable and empower local projects to evaluate their work and then use their learning in meaningful ways
- Identify cross-cutting findings and share these with WGI projects and across the sector so they are relevant and timely for use by different stakeholders.

### **Help through Crisis**

[Help through Crisis](#) is a £33 million programme supporting 69 partnerships across England. These partnerships help people who are experiencing or at risk of hardship crisis to overcome the difficulties they are facing and to plan for their futures.

People are supported to draw on personal experiences to build their skills and strengths, enabling them to make the most of future opportunities and challenges.



HtC is supported by a [learning, support and evaluation contract](#) delivered by a consortium formed by Ipsos MORI (lead contractor), Revolving Doors Agency and Hopkins Van Mill to:

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