



Adapting in adversity: summary

Delivering services to people experiencing multiple disadvantage during Covid-19

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1. Introduction

The National Lottery Community Fund (The Fund) has identified an opportunity to bring together evidence, learning and insights about the Covid-19 pandemic from across evaluation and learning contracts commissioned by The Fund. This summary document presents key findings from Fulfilling Lives¹, Women and Girls Initiative (WGI)² and Help through Crisis (HtC)³. These programmes support people facing severe and multiple disadvantage⁴ who, due to pre-existing inequalities, are particularly at risk of experiencing the negative consequences, and wider implications, of Covid-19.

This summary addresses challenges faced by partnerships and projects, and their beneficiaries, along with steps and solutions taken to respond to Covid-19. As the content focuses upon the experiences of partnerships and projects working to adapt and deliver services to those facing multiple disadvantage, the evidence, learning and insight 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 Fund and other funders
- commissioners, policymakers and service delivery organisations in sectors supporting those facing severe and multiple disadvantages.

2. Key evidence, learning and insight relating to partnerships and projects' responses to people experiencing multiple disadvantage in Covid-19

Evidence, learning and insights about the Covid-19 pandemic from across Fulfilling Lives, WGI and 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.

¹ Further details about the Fulfilling Lives programme and evaluation can be found at:

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/multiple-needs> Accessed 03/06/20.

² Further details about WGI and its Impact and Learning Service can be found at:

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/women-and-girls-initiative> Accessed 03/06/20.

³ Further details about HtC and its Learning, Support and Evaluation contract can be found at:

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/help-through-crisis> Accessed 03/06/20.

⁴ 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.

- Working in partnership with statutory and third sector agencies is a thread throughout the report. 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 trauma⁵, 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.
- 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.

3. Steps to support partnerships and projects

Partnerships and projects have outlined 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 the following 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.

⁵ Vicarious trauma takes place in an individual as a result of empathic engagement with traumatised individuals and reports of their traumatic experiences.

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 Covid-19 pandemic. These recommendations are as follows:

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, learning and insight activities include approaches that capture beneficiaries' voices and enable them to directly present their experiences and views about how services can best provide support to meet their needs.