Adapting in adversity: Thinking about the future

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Summary

Introduction

This report presents evidence, learning and insight from Fulfilling Lives, Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) and Help through Crisis (HtC)[1] to support with next steps during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What has worked well during the pandemic that can be taken forward

- There is evidence of improved partnership working to address the challenges of Covid-19. Already existing strong collaborative working practices have benefited responses to the pandemic and, in some cases, closer working relationships have developed.
- Community and voluntary groups have played an essential and vibrant role in providing welfare support; there is also evidence of engagement from private and public sector agencies pulling together. Delivering collaborative and co-ordinated local responses have: reduced duplication; ensured effective use of resources; and helped to connect services to people in crisis.
- Remote working has benefits relating to removing stress, time and cost alongside providing neutral space. It also allows for more frequent contact and more tailored and individual support. Partnerships and projects have taken effective steps to reduce digital exclusion and there is learning about the benefits afforded by remote co-production.
- Approaches taken to service provision by Fulfilling Lives partnerships have resulted in a number of positive outcomes relating to: homelessness; substance misuse; domestic violence; probation; mental health; and increases in benefit entitlement and greater flexibility from Jobcentre Plus / Department of Work and Pensions.

Changes for the future to address multiple disadvantage

- To support with the future and what needs to change to address multiple disadvantage and / or supporting those in crisis, key areas for consideration include: relationships with funders; meeting the need for continuing development of knowledge, learning and practice about remote working offering a range of ways of providing support to meet individual needs and personalised support; and staff wellbeing.
- In recognition of likely future changes in demand in uncertain local and national contexts, a learning paper from the HtC Learning, Support and Evaluation Team provides some tools and ideas for planning for the future during the pandemic.

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[1] Details of each of these programmes and their corresponding evaluation contracts are provided in Appendix 1

- Partnerships' and projects' responses to Covid-19 have achieved many positive outcomes for the individuals and communities they serve. Challenges remain and some changes are required.

Recommendations

- Those undertaking evaluation and other evidence support activities have provided a range of recommendations addressing important steps including: providing more integrated and joined up approaches to service delivery; ensuring the expertise of those with lived experience are included in changes to service delivery and, when possible, transition out of lockdown and post-lockdown planning; changes to relationships with funders; continued learning and development of remote working; and providing a range of approaches to service delivery.

1. Introduction

This report presents evidence, learning and insight from across Fulfilling Lives, Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) and Help through Crisis (HtC)[2]. It aims to support partnerships and projects, and others working to address multiple disadvantage[3], with next steps during the Covid-19 pandemic by presenting:

- what has worked well during Covid-19 and can be considered moving forwards;
- what needs to change /be considered moving forwards to address multiple disadvantage.

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 and 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.

There are three aims of this cross-cutting work as follows:

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.

1.2 Content of the report

The report addresses:

- what has worked well during Covid-19 to address multiple disadvantage that can be taken forwards;

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[2] Details of each of these programmes and their corresponding evaluation contracts are provided in Appendix 1.

[3] 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.

- that which needs to change for the future;
- suggested approaches to thinking about uncertainty and the future; and
- concluding comments.

2. What has worked well during Covid-19 that can be considered moving forwards

This section of the report provides evidence and learning from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC about what has worked well and can be considered moving forwards throughout the pandemic. It covers:

- working in partnership
- the role of community and voluntary groups
- drawing upon the benefits of remote digital working
- delivering face-to-face work
- positive impacts relating to homelessness, substance misuse, probation, mental health, domestic abuse, and increases in benefit entitlement and greater flexibility from Jobcentre Plus / Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

2.1 Working in partnership with others

There is evidence from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC of improved cross-sector working to address the challenges of Covid-19 (HtC LSE team 2020, Moreton et al 2020, Stradling 2020). Already existing strong collaborative working practices have benefited responses to the pandemic and, in some cases, closer working relationships have developed. One Fulfilling Lives partnership, for example, provided evidence of how strengthened partnerships have led to greater openness and a willingness to explore joint solutions and pool resources. Some HtC partnerships have started work with new partners, both formally through referral pathways or informally as part of local voluntary coalitions. The below example highlights the experience of some HtC partnerships:

To respond to Covid-19 and the changing needs of people in crisis, HtC partnerships have redesigned delivery models and developed new ways of working. While creating significant upheaval, there has been a shared sense of purpose across local organisations to support people and working towards a common goal has enabled HtC partnerships to break down barriers to collaboration and improve how they work with new and existing partners. Some HtC partnerships have stopped working with some partners and started new relationships by both building formal referral pathways and joining new local coalitions established in response to the pandemic. HtC partnerships have also raised awareness of their services to enable other organisations to make contact about working together or to refer people to their services.

(Help through Crisis Learning, Support and Evaluation Team 2020)

2.2 The role of community and voluntary groups

Community and voluntary groups have played an essential and vibrant role in providing welfare support (Moreton et al 2020, Help through Crisis Learning, Support and Evaluation Team 2020, Women and Girls Initiative Learning and Impact Services 2020). There is evidence of engagement from private and public sector agencies pulling together:

> 'Some community-wide responses have involved a coalition of different organisations including: local authorities, statutory services, local restaurants, foodbanks, community organisations, local charities, faith organisations and mutual aid groups.'

> (Help through Crisis Learning Support and Evaluation Team 2020)

HtC partnerships have also been involved in more informal 'coalitions' formed of mutual aid groups established to respond to the pandemic. This involvement includes for example, signposting to support, receiving referrals from other organisations and attending meetings (sometimes with service users). However, some HtC lead partners providing advice services have not been able to formally work with mutual aid groups as, due to having been set up quickly in response to Covid-19, they have not always been fully vetted.

Delivering collaborative and co-ordinated local responses has yielded a number of benefits including: reducing duplication; ensuring effective use of resources; and helping to connect services to people in crisis.

2.3 Drawing upon the benefits of remote digital working

As noted previously, Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects have utilised the opportunities provided by remote working (Smeaton et al 2020). In addition, remote working has the following benefits:

- removes the stress, time and cost involved in travelling to appointments - particularly useful if someone has multiple appointments on the same day;
- online or telephone communication can provide a more neutral space than meeting at a clinical or administrative building;
- enables more frequent contact; and
- allows for more tailored and individual support (rather than people having to conform to more rigid service processes) (Moreton et al 2020).

In recognition that some people face barriers to remote support, Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects have recognised the importance of taking steps to reduce digital exclusion by, for example, providing basic equipment, providing phone credit, and support to get online, create accounts and log-ins. The Fund's Evaluation Team has provided a slide deck to support with addressing multiple disadvantage with technology during Covid 19 (Cheshire et al 2020). This slide deck includes solutions and resources to respond to some of the challenges of remote working including:

- building confidence and motivation
- developing digital skills
- supporting those with disabilities or specific access requirements
- staying safe
- staff wellbeing.

In relation to co-production with those who experience multiple disadvantage and remote working, the HtC Learning, Support and Evaluation (LSE) Team have provided a webinar to HtC partnerships to support co-production with beneficiaries. Revolving Doors, a consortium member of the HtC LSE Team, have shared their positive experiences of delivering remote co-production activities. They have found some unexpected benefits of delivering remote co-production and highlighted how:

- remote co-production activities are more agile and, as a consequence, more can be done with less planning time;
- facilitating online can enable remote co-production to be more inclusive;
- remote co-production can be more efficient as more information can be generated and it can be easier to stay on-point;
- collaboration with others is benefited by remote co-production as it is easier to bring those with lived experience together with policymakers;
- there is more access and strategic focus; and
- access can be improved for some due to reduced costs and enabling those with anxiety and / or physical conditions to participate (Revolving Doors 2020).

2.4 Delivering face-to-face work

While there are benefits of delivering services remotely, there is recognition that some people cannot be reached remotely and some require face-to-face support (Moreton et al 2020, Help through Crisis Learning, Support and Evaluation Team 2020a and 2020b, Stradling 2020). Some WGI services, for example, with larger building and/or outdoor spaces have moved to some carefully navigated face-to-face work:

> In the process, they are navigating staff members' and clients' feelings about the changing rules, decisions around safety measures implemented (e.g. 1 metre or 2 metres distancing indoors), and staff availability as some cannot easily work away from home without childcare.

> (Stradling 2020)

2.5 Positive impacts of responses to homelessness

There are important lessons about supporting greater numbers of homeless people that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- self-contained hotel accommodation offers greater levels of privacy and security than hostels and meals have also been provided;
- a wide range of service providers and organisations have visited emergency accommodation to bring key services to people;

- some accommodation provider policies being more flexible and inclusive, with room inspections paused and eviction policies relaxed;
- greater flexibility from local authorities in what they recognised as priority need for housing, increased tolerance and reduction in evictions;
- restrictions on those with no recourse to public funds have been lifted in relation to housing (Moreton et al 2020).

2.6 Positive impacts of responses to substance misuse

There is evidence from Fulfilling Lives of numerous positive impacts relating to substance misuse including:

- better use made of previous assessment paperwork, reducing the need for beneficiaries to repeat themselves;
- unrealistic pre-conditions for some people affected by multiple disadvantage for treatment, such as attending a set number of support group sessions, have been dropped;
- having scripts collected and delivered by support services is said to have worked well and particularly helps beneficiaries who have limited access to transport and / or funds for public transport;
- beneficiaries have greater autonomy and flexibility to manage their own medication which results in them feeling empowered;
- greater use of support by phone and online this has meant, in some areas, people receive contact weekly, rather than more infrequent appointments at services; and
- the results of these changes are said to be fewer missed pick-ups, fewer people dropping out of treatment and greater engagement with support services (Moreton et al 2020).

2.7 Positive impacts for probation

Probation services are also making greater use of alternate, more flexible ways to engage with people:

- home visits are taking place and there is greater use of phone calls - welcomed by beneficiaries as it removes pressure to cover the cost of travel or difficulties due to underlying health conditions;
- as people no longer need to attend probation meetings on site, they are less likely to breach licence conditions;
- as face-to-face contact with probation has reduced, it appears probation services are working more closely with colleagues from the voluntary sector, including Fulfilling Lives partnerships, to understand the needs of those they support; and
- people are also given a mobile phone on release; given the increased importance of mobile connectivity, this would seem a helpful step to enable people to connect to key services (Moreton et al 2020).

2.8 Positive impacts for mental health

There is evidence from Fulfilling Lives of how mental health care has been adapted in respond to the pandemic with positive impacts:

- services are offering alternative forms of engagement, including structured counselling (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)) and emotional support by phone, online wellbeing groups and home visits from a consultant psychiatrist;
- remote forms of support have proven to be helpful for people who are not comfortable physically attending groups due to, for example, agoraphobia;
- the wider range of therapeutic and supportive activities available has also been appreciated - this includes partnerships sending out letters and cards, socially distanced walks in parks, provision of e-readers and art materials; and
- mental health prescriptions have been issued for longer periods (while some beneficiaries appreciate this, prescribing in larger volumes also comes with risks, including overdose or people selling them on) (Moreton et al 2020).

2.9 Positive impacts of support for women experiencing domestic abuse

There is evidence from both Fulfilling Lives and WGI of positive impacts of support for women experiencing domestic abuse. Lockdown and associated risks to women appear to have heightened public awareness of domestic abuse and have had a positive impact:

- the offer of emergency housing is thought to have helped some women to leave abusive relationships or spend time away from perpetrators if in separate accommodation at point of lockdown; and
- the move to more digital and phone support and services has improved access for some women who no longer need to leave the house and travel to services, organise childcare, sit in waiting areas with men and are less likely to feel stigma as a result ((Moreton et al 2020).

2.10 Positive impacts from increases in benefit entitlements and greater flexibility from Jobcentre Plus / DWP

There are also positive impacts from increases in benefit entitlements and greater flexibility:

- beneficiaries no longer need to attend the job centre in person;
- despite difficulties in contacting the Universal Credit helpline, online and phone interactions are reported to have increased engagement and reduced stigma;
- flexibility around making online claims and a reduction in conditionality have also been valued;
- increases in rates for Universal Credit and Local Housing Allowance, suspension of loan repayments and faster payments have also been helpful; and

- building upon relationships that were largely developing prior to Covid-19, several partnerships reported how they have been working well with DWP colleagues, for example to encourage referrals (Moreton et al 2020).

3. The future and what needs to change

This section of the report focuses upon the future and what needs to change to address multiple disadvantage and / or supporting those in crisis. There are four key areas focusing on:

- addressing multiple disadvantage in general
- relationships with funders
- meeting the need for continuing development of knowledge, learning and practice about remote working
- offering a range of ways of providing support.

3.1 Addressing multiple disadvantage

Evidence from Fulfilling Lives has led to the following recommendations to address multiple disadvantage in general:

- to support with reach and engagement, *bring* a range of support *to* people who need it, rather than expecting people to visit multiple services;
- continue to explore ways to further integrate services and provide more out-reach and 'in-reach' support to those receiving services (for example, providing help with mental and physical health alongside housing support);
- drawing upon experts with lived experience's emphasis upon the value of person-centred support, service commissioning and design will benefit from allowing time to develop trusting relationships between people; and
- include the experiences of beneficiaries and their insights and contributions to ensure a considered transition out of lockdown to co-produce post-lockdown planning (Moreton et al 2020).

3.2 Relationships with funders

Having demonstrated throughout the pandemic how the sector can mobilise with a multitude of partners to support women, girls and families, there is sector appreciation of funder recognition that the sector knows how best to respond to the pandemic (Stradling 2020). The WGI Learning and Impact Services Team have identified changes that WGI projects would like to see in their relationships with funders. There is recognition that the traditional approach for funding applications to pre-determine a project design, partnerships and deliverables may be reassuring for funders but:

> 'can feel like creating a fiction that is rarely relevant when it comes to the delivery phase.'
> (Stradling 2020)

WGI projects would like to see funders move away from continuously asking for new 'innovative' idea but, through conversations with projects:

- identify long-term needs
- trust and invest in organisations to deliver and report against these overarching objectives
- enable projects to work with the partnerships and methods that best meet women and girls' individual needs.

3.3 Meeting the need for continuing development of knowledge, learning and practice about remote working

While some work to address multiple disadvantage is already, or will be, undertaken in work settings and through other face-to-face means, there is recognition that a high degree of home working is likely moving to the future. It is therefore important to continue to develop knowledge and practice about working in the online space (Stradling 2020). To add to this, it is also important to consider:

- addressing digital inclusion so that the people services support have the equipment, skills, motivation and support to effectively engage with, and access, support and other activities online;
- enabling staff to provide effective support and activities online by having appropriate equipment and building upon their existing skills;
- ensuring working online is safe to protect all – to include addressing online safeguarding, privacy and data protection;
- addressing the gender imbalance in digital skills; and
- supporting staff wellbeing when working remotely (Cheshire et al 2020).

There are also pertinent questions about remote co-production activity that require further investigation (Revolving Doors 2020) relating to the following:

- is working via video sustainable?
- what are the longer-term effects of working remotely?
- what are the costs of the efficiencies gained through remote co-production?
- what is sacrificed as a result of remote co-production?
- what do those with lived experience really think about remote co-production?
- while Zoom video calls often work well for 'ask and listen' remote co-production consultations but work less well for problem-solving; therefore, how can remote co-produced problem-solving be improved?
- how can accessibility be widened for those who are digitally excluded?

3.4 Offering a range of options for providing support

As noted previously, the Fulfilling Lives national evaluation team, the WGI Learning and Impact Services Team and the HtC LSE Team have noted the importance of recognising that there are some for whom it is necessary to provide face-to-face support in a safe manner due to the challenges faced via remote reach. There is also need to offer a range of options for providing support to meet the needs and circumstances of individuals (Cheshire et al 2020 and Moreton et al 2020). This includes recognising that there are some groups and individuals for whom working through digital means is not an option. Where this is the case, there is merit for considering opportunities for safe socially distanced face to face work.

4. Suggested approaches to thinking about uncertainty and the future

The HtC LSE Team have highlighted how national and local contexts are constantly changing during the pandemic and that there is a huge amount of uncertainty about how the situation may change over the coming months. In particular, there is lack of clarity about:

- government schemes and whether they will end or change in relation to who can access support and how they do so;
- whether localised or national lockdowns will take place - rules on social distancing and wider restrictions could impact the ability of services to continue as normal; and
- whether projects will secure additional funding and how services may need to be adapted for future support needs.

Uncertainty makes it difficult for partnership and projects to anticipate future demand and plan for the short and longer-term future. The LSE Team note how the current uncertainties reinforce the importance of planning for the weeks and months ahead:

> Predictions about the future can be wrong - there are always a huge number of unknowns and some events are not possible to foresee. Taking time to think about the future is not about being right but about being prepared by thinking about different possible scenarios. Partnerships can consider what they need to put in place to maximise opportunities and manage risks for their projects. Thinking about the future is a challenging but important way to prepare for what happens next.

> (Help through Crisis Learning, Support and Evaluation Team 2020c)

The LSE Team's learning paper planning and preparing for future changes in demand provides some ideas and tools for planning for the future. The learning paper sets out three scenarios for different types of COVID-19 restrictions and responses in future which, at the time of writing the learning paper (August 2020), reflect the main COVID-19 responses. The three scenarios are:

1. *Recurring lockdowns*: requirements to stay at home and socially distance are repeatedly introduced and relaxed across England or locally. This could have a significant (and unpredictable) impact on individual health and wellbeing, employment levels, and public services.
2. *Permanent change*: although lockdown measures are relaxed, some aspects such as social distancing or wearing masks remain in place. Individuals, communities and the economy do not return to how they were before COVID-19.

3. *Slow but steady return*: involves a gradual return to 'business as usual' with the continuing removal of lockdown measures. This enables businesses and services to reopen in full – although specific individual impacts on health and wellbeing or employment may remain.

The HtC LSE Team note that what may happen in the future may include elements of all three scenarios.

The learning paper provides tools for thinking through the impacts for each of the three scenarios in relation to: people in crisis; teams and partnerships; and project delivery.

It also provides links to two additional resource to support with scenario planning: a blog from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation (SCVO)s' [on planning for an uncertain future post lockdown](#) and an [article on scenario planning](#) from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

5. Concluding comments

Responses to Covid-19 from Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects not only reveal how they have adapted with flex and insight but also achieved many positive outcomes. This is during a time of immense disruption and hardship in wider society, the workplace and in the home. Partnerships and projects have identified ways of working that serve well both those they seek to support and their local communities. Covid-19 has also posed challenges and the need for further change remains to enable the Fund, its grantholders and others to continue to support the communities and individuals they seek to serve and ensure people thrive as the pandemic continues.

The professionals involved in evaluating and supporting the Fulfilling Lives, WGI and HtC partnerships and projects have adapted with flexibility to ensure their learning, support and evaluation activities align with what is taking place on programmes and the needs of those delivering services. Their recommendations point to the importance of:

- bringing services and support to people;
- providing more integrated approaches to service delivery;
- drawing upon the expertise of those with lived experience in changes to service delivery, transitions out of (and into) lockdowns and post-lockdown planning;
- funders taking on board both grantholders' experiences of delivering services during the pandemic and the future development of relationships with funders;
- continued learning and development of remote working, to include approaches to remote co-production;
- providing both remote and face-to-face approaches to deliver tailored services and support to meet individuals' needs and circumstances; and
- planning and preparing for further changes as Covid-19 continues.

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Appendix 1: Information about Fulfilling Lives, Women and Girls Initiative 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.