

Case study: Society Inc

August 2021

Society Inc are a registered charity that provides mentoring and befriending across the Greater Manchester area. The organisation fosters connections with a wide profile of clients and residents, including those affected by low-income or unemployment and isolated members of the community. By supporting better relationships in local communities, Society Inc aims to reduce social isolation, increase engagement in positive activities, and improve mental and physical health and overall well-being.

Society Inc received £45,557 through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF). The CCSF is a funding programme supported by a grant of £200 million from Government, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, to help organisations in England respond to the COVID-19 crisis and increase community support to people affected by the pandemic.

How was the CCSF grant used?

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions impacted how Society Inc operated in multiple ways, including disrupting its typical income generation activities, for example taking student placements (e.g. nurses) from local universities. In addition, most of the charity's trustees are registered nurses who were redeployed to the NHS frontline. This significantly reduced their capacity to manage the charity. The CCSF grant was used to recruit a full-time operational lead to ensure that the charity remained operational during the pandemic.

“
If we'd not been able to get our operational lead in post, we would have had to close ... It's been a lifesaver to the charity in terms of getting this money ... it's allowed us to continue the work we do.” – Grantholder (Trustee)

The charity also began receiving new types of requests for support beyond mentoring and befriending. For example, people were asking for food, toiletries or phone credit, especially those who were vulnerable and shielding. Society Inc used part of the CCSF grant to deliver food, activity and well-being products and parcels to doorsteps, including 65 Christmas hampers. They also purchased and provided computer tablets and phones to help clients engage in online activity and support.

The CCSF grant was also used so that staff could 'apply' for specific items that were needed by clients. This helped the charity to be responsive to clients' needs, which were often changing due to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

Lastly, Society Inc moved premises to be more COVID-secure and used the grant to help purchase key office equipment and PPE to create a safe environment and enable socially distanced meetings.

Quick facts:

Grant period: July 2020-January 2021

1 operational lead recruited

15 emergency applications for specific items

65 Christmas hampers delivered

Three key messages:

- ① The CCSF grant gave Society Inc the confidence to continue to deliver and meet additional needs and referrals from partner organisations as well as Greater Manchester Mental Health Services.
- ② Provision of tablets and mobile phones will support clients in the longer-term to access social contact, potentially reducing the use of NHS or other helplines.
- ③ Local charities were brought together with the common goal of supporting the local community, resulting in greater collaboration and sense of community.

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What difference did the CCSF grant make?

For people and communities

The CCSF grant helped Society Inc remain operational and continue delivering their mentoring and befriending support throughout the pandemic in virtual or socially distanced ways. This was especially important for people because of the additional stresses caused by the pandemic that negatively impacted many of their day-to-day lives. For some, receiving food, activity and well-being doorstep deliveries meant that their immediate needs were met.



We speak every week. We're like friends now ... I don't get out hardly, I can't get out ... It's nice to speak to someone. We have a laugh ... she makes sure that I'm alright, if I need anything ... I suffer with anxiety and depression, so just to have her there, it makes me feel better. – Beneficiary

If staff saw that a client needed a specific item that would support their physical and/or mental wellbeing, staff could 'apply' to use a portion of the CCSF grant to purchase these items. For example, this included kitchen items (freezer, microwave, blender) to help individuals cook for themselves or their families. In most cases, these responded to emergency situations to prevent a breakdown in the client's mental health. In some cases, these seemingly small purchases had a significant impact, for example, improving the nutrition and health of one family's children. The staff member supporting the family felt this helped social services reduce their involvement with the family.



My fridge-freezer was broke and all the food that was in it, I had to fling ... She rang me back a few days later and said they were getting me a fridge-freezer. It was just unbelievable ... It's just my size, it's lovely. – Beneficiary

Staff were not aware of any other services in the area that provided similar support during this period.

Key legacy from CCSF:

The employment of the operational lead opened new opportunities for the charity, including winning a bid with the Living Well Programme and employing three new staff members, which will increase capacity to support more clients.

For volunteers

Society Inc saw a drop in their volunteers as they were making sense of the changed circumstances, taking over home-schooling responsibilities, or shielding themselves or for someone in their support bubble. Over time, volunteers returned but during the CCSF grant period, many volunteers were under the same stresses as clients. As such, Society Inc provided similar support for their volunteers as their clients, for example, providing them with essential items and doorstep check-ins.



Our volunteers are just as important as our clients to us, their welfare and their wellbeing. We had a couple of volunteers shielding ... so we made sure we checked on them. – Staff member (former volunteer)

For the organisation and its staff

Society Inc used the CCSF grant to employ an operational lead and to purchase tablets and mobile phones. This enabled them to continue delivering the mentoring and befriending services virtually and to take on a larger number of referrals and offer new types of support. The operational lead provided supervision and emotional support to staff while they adapted to working from home and supporting clients through WhatsApp and phone/video calls.

This oversight and support was particularly valued because phone/video calls made it harder for staff to assess the needs of clients than meeting them in person. The supervision helped to support the shift to remote provision through the discussion of challenging cases, particularly where clients disclosed sensitive information over the phone.



We had an open office where clients would come in, have a cup of tea, have a biscuit, have a chat and obviously that all changed overnight ... We had to start working on phone calls, which proved difficult at first because ... you can't see their body language, facial features. – Staff member

Want to know more?

Website: www.societyinc.org

Twitter: www.twitter.com/Societyinc17

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SocietyIncLHulton

Instagram: www.instagram.com/SocietyInc_LH