

June 2021

Help through Crisis

Effective Service Delivery

A Networking, Learning & Sharing Event Summary Report

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. It 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 small voluntary groups and established charities to work together locally. 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 & Evaluation events

Since 2017 the Learning, Support & Evaluation (LSE) consortium, led by Ipsos MORI, has developed and run national and regional events to give opportunities for HtC partnerships to explore areas of common interest, support each other's learning on crisis support, and share good practice. During the Covid-19 pandemic the delivery mode for all events shifted to online webinars and workshops, allowing the LSE team to continue to provide these learning and sharing opportunities. This has included webinars which gave partnerships the opportunity to share the challenges being faced, and explore the opportunities being taken to support beneficiaries during the pandemic. 'Effective Service Delivery' is one of the culminating events in this overall series.

This report provides a short summary of the key points that emerged during the informal discussions over two 'Effective Service Delivery' workshops. It outlines a set of principles derived from the discussion that captures what HtC partnerships identified as being fundamental to effective delivery of crisis support. It also includes some examples people gave in the workshops of how these principles work in practice. A separate document outlining the Principles of Effective Service Delivery has been developed to share beyond the HtC programme, combining learning from these workshops with learning from in-depth case study work with HtC partnerships.

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1. Introduction

The Effective Service Delivery discussions were held over two workshops on 16 and 23 March 2021. Partnerships were invited to attend both workshops and take part in a reflective task in between the sessions. Each workshop was attended by 23 people from 21 HtC partnerships and only two attendees were unable to attend both workshops. Three attendees were from The National Lottery Community Fund.

The workshops each ran for two hours on Zoom and were facilitated by Hopkins Van Mil (part of the LSE consortium). The workshops aimed to explore what effective service delivery for crisis support looks like. This included reflections and learnings on:

- What has worked well for partnerships, organisations, managers, frontline staff and beneficiaries;
- What advice partnerships would give to others who might offer similar support in the future;
- The legacy partnerships would like to leave from the HtC programme.

2. Summarising the principles for effective service delivery

“We’ve got together [at these events], had a look at what can help people through their crisis and worked it out together. There isn’t a magic wand, but there is something magical.”

Lead partner staff

Throughout the workshops, partnerships discussed the key principles that underpin effective service delivery for crisis support. The five principles highlighted in the workshops were:

1. Offer meaningful person-centred support

A **person-centred approach** is central to effective crisis support. It can help empower beneficiaries to be in control of their lives and set their own pace for change. Tailoring support to individual needs and working with beneficiaries to identify a route through crisis that will work for them helps people in crisis take responsibility for their own future.

2. Provide and develop long-term support

It is important to **take time to develop relationships** with beneficiaries (as well as partnerships), and to understand the complexity of people’s lives. Support through crisis is not a quick fix - it occurs gradually through carefully building trust, professionalism and courage. It is also important to take time to **test ways of working and refine delivery**.

3. Embed a flexible approach to service delivery

A **flexible approach with beneficiaries, colleagues and partners** is crucial to effective service delivery. Understanding there is no single solution to the crises people face underpins this collaborative effort. It is also important to appreciate that needs may change (including beneficiaries’ individual needs and the needs of the local area). Partnerships must be able to adapt to reflect these changing needs in order to provide effective support.

4. Create and maintain a strong network of partners

Partnerships are central to the Help through Crisis approach. The approach draws on **specialist skills and resources to deliver change** to beneficiaries. Successful partnerships provide a **holistic approach** to crisis support, drawing on the support offered by partners to address a wide range of needs. Effective partnerships are built on equality and trust.

5. Support staff and volunteers to deliver effectively

Working closely with frontline teams through **supervision, support and reflective practice** is important to build the resilience which allows staff and volunteers to deliver effective crisis support. The high-pressure nature of crisis support work should never be underestimated: staff wellbeing policies need to be flexible, fully embedded within organisations and lived out in daily practice.

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3. The structure of the workshops

The first workshop began with a presentation from Rebecca Wilson, Research Manager at Ipsos MORI. This presentation recapped the service delivery related outputs produced by the LSE team over the course of the HtC programme (available [here](#)). This overview was followed by two presentations from HtC partnership staff and beneficiaries who spoke about their approaches to effective service delivery:

- **Lesley Penny, Sonia Browne and J-Lo: Mid & South Norfolk Crisis Support**
 - Lesley Penny, Project Co-ordinator at Mid & South Norfolk Crisis Support, drew on the partnership's experience to speak about the importance of:
 - Longevity: running the programme over more than three years allows learning on what works to develop over time. Learning included how to develop an effective partnership with a range of specialisms available within it.
 - Experience: a team of confident Advice Champions were able to build trust with beneficiaries over time and support them to take small achievable steps out of crisis.
 - Flexibility: adapting to change, finding new ways of working and supporting new forms of crisis as they emerge are key to effective delivery.
 - Sonia Browne, an Advice Champion at Mid & South Norfolk Crisis Support, spoke of her experience and invited J-Lo to join the event by telephone to present what had worked for her as a beneficiary of the HtC programme. J-Lo spoke powerfully about her experience and highlighted:
 - The importance of her relationship with the Advice Champion and the benefits of the Advice Champion working flexibly with her in informal ways.
 - The value she gained from attending partnership meetings and helping others by working with the partnership to develop a space on their website for [top tips](#), [life tracks](#) and [photos](#), to help other people in times of crisis.
- **Sarah Jones and Adam, Mencap Liverpool, Reaching Out & Moving On**
 - Sarah Jones, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Mencap Liverpool, spoke about Mencap Liverpool's programme of work with people with learning disabilities, "Reaching Out & Moving On", and the three phases of support that this provides:
 - Prevention: supporting beneficiaries through their immediate crisis situation.
 - Progression: working with beneficiaries to move on from their crisis.
 - Packaging: beneficiaries using their experience to benefit others.
 - Sarah also highlighted the role their partnership played to prevent people with learning disabilities in crisis from falling into the gap between specialist and mainstream services.
 - Adam, a beneficiary from Mencap Liverpool, highlighted the stress and anxiety he feels during the benefit assessment process and the barrier complex forms create to resolving crisis situations. He spoke about the need for clear communication about the support

people are eligible for and spaces that make people safe and supported, rather than anxious and on edge.

We are grateful to our speakers for providing the stimulus for the discussions that followed.

Attendees of the first workshop were then divided into three break-out rooms to share lessons and experiences about effective service delivery. These discussions gave partnerships the opportunity to informally reflect on what has been effective for them more broadly. Attendees focused on the advice they would give to others working in crisis support and the legacy they would like to leave from the programme. The second workshop focused on developing the principles that support effective crisis service delivery. The rest of this report summarises the key points from these discussions.

4. Principles in practice

In the following section we set out examples given during the workshops for each of the five principles.

4.1 Offer meaningful person-centred support

“I think it’s really important to always have the client’s voice in your head, that should guide everything you do.” *Lead partner staff*

Person-centred support involves giving people the confidence to take control of their own route through crisis. Partnerships highlighted that, for support to be effective, beneficiaries need to be ready to accept that change is needed in their lives and act on the advice and support they are given. Understanding and supporting beneficiaries’ individual needs and developing strong, trusting relationships is important to helping beneficiaries achieve this mindset. By contrast, if beneficiaries do not accept that change is needed, they are unlikely to take ownership of their own transition through crisis. When this sense of ownership is missing, transitions through crisis will usually be less effective and only short-term. Providing support that is holistic and tailored to peoples’ needs can help empower beneficiaries by helping them to feel confident and supporting them to make meaningful changes in their lives.

In discussions, partnerships clearly stated the importance of relationship-building between staff and beneficiaries. Partnerships spoke of the need for mutual trust and for beneficiaries to trust that HtC staff will be there when needed. This trust was built over time through staff attending appointments with beneficiaries and supporting them to navigate the benefits, housing or legal system. However, staff availability needs to be balanced with staff knowing when to step back and empower beneficiaries to work on their issues independently. For example, one partnership described supporting an individual to set up repayment plans to pay off his debt and find accommodation: some days he was able to handle the next step in the process, whereas at other times he needed hands-on support from the partnership.

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Partnerships described the relationship between beneficiaries and support workers as both emotional and practical in nature and most effective when led by beneficiaries themselves. Beneficiaries benefit the most from crisis support when they want to make changes and take steps to gain more control of their situation.

A strengths-based approach is one way to ensure crisis support is person-centred and responsive to beneficiaries. Partnerships described the importance of a “strengths-based approach” that recognises and focuses upon beneficiaries’ talents and skills to enable them to make sustainable changes to their lives. Attendees gave examples of using music and drama to bring out beneficiaries’ skills and help them to work through the crisis they are experiencing.

Partnerships recognised that co-production and beneficiary voice were important to providing support that moves beyond “quick-fix” problem solving and empowers people to develop long-term sustainable life changes. Some HtC beneficiaries have progressed to volunteering within their partnership, with other organisations and helping others through setting up peer support groups. Partnerships viewed peer mentors and ‘buddy’ projects as a useful way to encourage beneficiaries to take more control in their own lives by helping others. Partnerships identified peer support networks as a clear example of the legacy of the HtC programme in the communities they work in.

4.2 Provide and develop long-term support

“What I would say has been particularly effective for us is the longevity of the programme. I think that having... five years really made the difference in the success [of the partnership], in us establishing... ways of working that actually work.” *Lead partner staff*

Partnerships emphasised the value of the HtC programme’s longevity. Many highlighted how the four or five-year funding gave them the time to get things “right” and allowed partnerships to embed a culture of learning. As a result, partnerships were able to refine their delivery over time, through testing and adapting their approaches and embedding learning from the testing process. Partnerships also used this time to identify tools, actions and partners to support the range of multi-layered and complex needs of beneficiaries experiencing crisis.

Partnerships also highlighted how positive change for people going through crisis takes time, commitment and understanding from both beneficiaries and support workers. It is therefore important for organisations delivering crisis support to be patient with beneficiaries and not to expect positive changes in their lives to take place immediately. The HtC programmes’ longevity gave beneficiaries the opportunity to develop trust with their support workers and change their lives more fundamentally than would have been possible with a short-term programme. Examples included: getting on a stable financial footing; finding a secure, safe and affordable home; and reducing dependency on drugs and alcohol.

As an example of the patience, commitment and understanding partnerships and beneficiaries built together, one partnership mentioned supporting a street homeless young man who was initially only

able to take small steps towards change. He would disappear from the crisis support programme for weeks at a time and then come back for further help when he was ready. Due to staff being understanding of the need for him to move at his own pace initially, he remained engaged with the support and is now making rapid progress towards a more positive life.

4.3 Embed a flexible approach to service delivery

“Everyone here agrees they have needed to be flexible. As the needs have changed and the policies have changed around how the Government is dealing with benefits and welfare reform, the impact of the pandemic, the need to evolve and change has been absolutely fundamental.” *Lead partner staff*

Partnerships agreed that working flexibly with beneficiaries, colleagues and partners was critical to delivering an effective crisis support service. In contrast, partnerships reported that sticking to rigid ways of working was not effective, particularly over a four or five-year programme. Frontline staff need to be able to adapt their tools and techniques to fit a wide range of situations. Partnerships spoke of the need to work flexibly with beneficiaries in order to take account of their individual needs. They emphasised that there is no single solution to different crises people may experience, while beneficiaries’ needs may also change over time. For example, one partnership spoke of adapting staff training in response to a new identified need for crisis support among refugees and asylum seekers. By amending their training programme, the partnership was able to support beneficiaries who needed guidance on immigration issues, even though it was not part of their original HtC remit. Flexibility is also needed for partnerships to respond to policy changes and changes in the economic climate that may have implications for the support that people going through a crisis need.

4.4 Create and maintain a strong network of partners

“That knowledge of each other, how you work, what you offer, how you offer it, and who fits well within the needs of your beneficiary... I think that strong partnerships can create a lot of innovative practices.” *Lead partner staff*

Creating a strong network of local service delivery partners has been central to the HtC approach throughout the programme. The value of being able to draw on specialist skills and resources to deliver change for beneficiaries is important to all HtC partnerships. Developing networks of specialist wider partners beyond the programme has also enabled HtC partnerships to provide more holistic support to a wide range of beneficiaries experiencing different circumstances. One partnership spoke of the importance of developing a local network so that, when a new issue emerged as particularly pressing for beneficiaries, the HtC partnership had access to the specialist advice and support needed.

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Partnerships highlighted longer-term, sustainable benefits of successful partnership working through the programme. This included how:

- close and effective relationships built over time yielded positive benefits for both partner organisations and the beneficiaries they work with. These benefits include sharing knowledge, developing effective and efficient ways of working together, and facilitating smooth referrals for beneficiaries.
- the work undertaken through the programme laid the foundation for building successful partnerships, developing crisis support programmes, and providing mechanisms for helping those in need in the future (beyond HtC)

Some HtC partnerships also discussed actions they had taken when collaboration with their service delivery partners had not worked out as planned. For example, several partnerships shared the experience of replacing delivery partners who were unable or unwilling to continue to contribute to the HtC programme. Deciding to change the partnership and bring in alternative organisations was a hard decision for these partnerships, but necessary in adapting the programme to meet beneficiaries' needs and ensure delivery partners contributed positively to the programme.

4.5 Support staff and volunteers to deliver effectively

“Our project is very much about building resilience ... the length of time that you have as a project to actually invest in the staff, invest in developing and learning to create something better and giving teams a voice is quite important.” Lead partner staff

Partnerships worked hard throughout the programme to build staff and volunteer resilience. This supported frontline workers to be better able to help those in crisis, while also making projects more sustainable.

Partnerships emphasised the importance of recognising the increasingly heavy workloads of their staff. This was attributed to different reasons, including changing policy and practice and evolving beneficiary needs. Partnerships reported that demands on staff and volunteers in terms of their workload were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic and highlighted how managers, staff and volunteers had worked together to develop approaches to mitigate the additional workloads. They spoke of the vital need for staff teams to avoid burn-out and address other adverse effects of crisis support work on staff and volunteer wellbeing.

Partnerships also reported how creating an environment of beneficiary independence rather than dependence was challenging. For example, high caseloads meant frontline staff often felt it was more time efficient to solve problems on behalf of beneficiaries, rather than working with beneficiaries to

support them to resolve issues themselves. Managers reported that strong supervision and reflective practice to support staff in their day-to-day interactions with beneficiaries could help avoiding staff ***“falling back into problem solving mode”***.

Partnerships spoke about how flexible policies for staff and volunteer management could help embed positive wellbeing practices. Examples included:

- Regularly reviewing and applying wellbeing policies in daily work, to ensure they are practical and ‘lived’.
- Having ‘no drop-in’ days with no meetings with beneficiaries (either face to face or online), so that staff can focus on administrative work, go on training sessions and have time to plan and ***“time to breathe”***.
- Giving space to staff to enable them to be creative, think out of the box, and work in new ways which support both staff and beneficiaries.

5. Reflecting on the successes of the HtC programme

“We’re saving people’s lives – literally. Helping them with their families, their mental health. The sheer number of clients we’ve helped and them saying they wouldn’t be here without us surely brings home how important this project is.” Lead partner staff

Partnerships reflected on the various successes of the HtC programme. Partnerships reported how the crisis support they provided made a positive impact on individuals and their local area more generally. They gave examples of tangible impacts, such as reduction in acute hospital admissions and helping people into employment.

Partnerships reflected on the resilience, relationships and trust built up among staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and partner organisations through HtC. Partnerships reported that this enabled strengthened relationships between statutory and specialist services that would continue to benefit crisis support programmes in the future.

The need to widely share the HtC legacy and what partnerships have learnt about effective service delivery was emphasised throughout. Given the success of the programme, partnerships wanted to know their work would have a legacy that others developing crisis support programmes could learn from.

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