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PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE CRISIS SUPPORT SECTOR

May 2021

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 Fund), the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HtC 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 local small voluntary groups and established charities. 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 and Evaluation team

The HtC Learning, Support and Evaluation (LSE) team is a consortium of organisations commissioned by The National Lottery Community Fund to help build understanding and capture learning from the HtC programme. The team is made up of people from Ipsos MORI (Lead Contractor), Revolving Doors Agency and Hopkins Van Mil. The role of the consortium is to work with the 69 partnerships involved in the programme to:

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



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Introduction to the crisis support principles

This document presents principles for effective service delivery in the crisis support sector, based on key learning from the HtC programme. These principles were developed with local HtC partnerships that have delivered crisis support since 2016.

Partnerships shared their experiences of delivering effective crisis support during a focused two-part online event held in March 2021, as well as through in-depth case study work undertaken throughout the programme. These common themes have been found to underpin effective delivery across partnerships, even though they work with beneficiaries in different contexts.

1. Offer meaningful person-centred support

People access crisis support for a range of reasons. Therefore, taking a holistic approach that recognises and seeks to address the varied needs of beneficiaries is essential to effective crisis support. By putting the people accessing their services at the heart of what they do, services can foster strong relationships, trust and mutual respect between beneficiaries and those providing support.

HtC partnerships have developed person-centred crisis support by:

- a) **Taking a 'strengths-based' approach** which recognises that people accessing support have talents and skills they can use to help make changes to their lives.
- b) **Giving beneficiaries a voice** in designing and improving services, by providing meaningful ways for them to share their experiences and shape decisions.
- c) **Developing detailed assessment models** that allow for tailored services based on individual needs and avoid a 'one size fits all' approach.

Principle in practice: Citizens Advice (CA) Telford & The Wrekin consulted beneficiaries when designing group sessions for their project.

Beneficiaries' feedback suggested that they wanted support with budgeting and money management. In response, the project organised financial resilience workshops on topics such as 'how to cook on a budget' and 'how to save'.

The workshops used creative methods to engage people: in one resilience workshop on the topic of 'loan sharks', beneficiaries worked with an artist to create a mural of a shark while talking about what they thought of loan sharks.

"The first thing I did was a lunch all those years ago and ask them [beneficiaries] what they would like to participate in and how we could get the best out of them. And a lot of them were saying about the resilience workshop." - Lead partner staff



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2. Provide and develop long-term support

Providing long-term crisis support is fundamental to the ethos of the HtC programme. Long-term support gives beneficiaries the time to make meaningful changes to their lives and move beyond their immediate crisis. Ongoing engagement with beneficiaries also means services can deliver preventative work to mitigate future crises. Long-term funding for the multi-year HtC programme gave local partnerships opportunities to test different approaches and refine their delivery over time. This led to new ways of working for some organisations.

HtC partnerships have developed effective long-term support provision by:

- a) **Being patient with beneficiaries and not expecting immediate results.** It takes time to build the strong, trust-based relationships between beneficiaries and support workers needed for effective crisis support.
- b) **Establishing connections with other support organisations and promoting their work to embed delivery in the local area.** This ensures that local organisations are aware of the support available from each other, which is important for referrals. When crisis support services develop a good reputation in local communities, potential beneficiaries also know where to go for help when they face crisis.
- c) **Developing and testing different approaches to service delivery,** recognising that it takes time to find out how to deliver effective crisis support. Both formal and informal feedback from beneficiaries can be used to adapt and improve services.

Principle in practice: Luton Citizens Advice refined their delivery approach over time. Six months after their funding started, they trialled outreach sessions at places such as the local GP surgery. This had limited success. They then tested running outreach sessions at the local Jobcentre. This was much more successful – they formed a successful partnership with the Jobcentre while reaching new people in the community. Luton Citizens Advice highlighted how important it was for crisis support organisations to think long term and keep persevering when trying out new initiatives.

“These are hard to reach people, and you just need to be a little bit more patient to get things going with them.” - Lead partner staff

3. Embed a flexible approach to service delivery

Embedding a flexible approach to crisis support means services can be responsive to change. For example, personal circumstances of individual beneficiaries will change if supported over a long time. There will also be changes in local communities and shifts in the wider social and policy context. Embedding flexibility in service delivery helps ensure the changing needs of current and potential beneficiaries remain central to the support provided.



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HtC partnerships have embedded flexible approaches by:

- a) **Ensuring they recognise and reflect on how beneficiaries' individual needs change** over time. Providing effective crisis support involves being aware when approaches are not working or are no longer suitable and adapting the support accordingly.
- b) **Working with partners to respond to changing local needs.** Working closely with local partners helps identify how and when services may need to be adapted to be more effective. For example, the specific types of people who need crisis support may change over time, as may the kinds of support they need. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of local partnerships in reaching new people who required crisis support.
- c) **Being aware of wider changes that may shape local crisis support needs.** For crisis support services to be effective, they need to keep up to date with what is going on locally - such as changes to the support offered by other organisations. It is also important that organisations know about broader social, economic and policy developments that might influence crisis support needs and require services to adapt what they do.

Principle in practice: The Cambridge Crisis Network previously held drop-in sessions in GP practices in rural areas. This meant local people could access support without having to travel into central Cambridge, which some found difficult or expensive. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, access to GP practices became restricted and the drop-in sessions had to stop. Staff were worried about how to reach people who would normally attend these sessions and might not otherwise know how to access support. In response, the HtC partnership put up posters about their support in the local GP surgeries where drop-in sessions would normally take place. This led to an increase in people getting in touch directly with the network for support.

“We made lots of posters to put in the surgeries with information on, tips and advice, and how to get in contact with us directly.” - Lead partner staff

4. Create and maintain a strong network of partners

Successful partnership working is a common theme across a number of these crisis support principles. Relationships with other organisations provide opportunities to share resources and learning. Partnerships can improve knowledge of local needs and wider support available. This in turn can strengthen referral pathways between services, allowing services to support people with multiple needs more effectively.

HtC partnerships have created strong networks through:

- a) **Building partnerships that include organisations able to offer complementary services.** These partnerships can help provide more holistic crisis support to beneficiaries. Frontline services, such as foodbanks, can also help crisis support organisations reach people in the community who would benefit from longer term support.
- b) Working closely with other local organisations to **make referrals between services more straightforward for beneficiaries.** Many HtC partnerships have established shared referral



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pathways with different local services, such as Jobcentres, mental health services, GPs, local councils, and other specialist advice and support services.

- c) **Developing effective ways of working with partners.** Agreeing on a collective vision for a partnership and putting in place clear governance arrangements from the start can help provide a framework for how organisations can work together effectively. Communicating regularly with formal and informal partners can also help build trust between organisations and provide a way to share learning about good practice.

Principle in practice: WomenCentre Halifax realised during the early stages of their project that their case workers were spending a lot of time helping people with debt, finance, and benefits issues. WomenCentre Halifax wanted to offer quicker, more effective crisis support in this area. They decided to set up a dedicated service for specialist debt and benefit advice provided by their partner, Citizens Advice Calderdale. The new service streamlined the support their beneficiaries received. Citizens Advice Calderdale are specialists in debt and benefit advice and were able to resolve beneficiaries' issues more efficiently. This allowed WomenCentre Halifax's case workers to concentrate on providing support for wellbeing and physical and mental health, making better use of their time and expertise. The HtC partnership was therefore able to take a more holistic approach to delivering support.

"[Citizens Advice Calderdale] could provide the specialist debt and benefit advice when we needed it, which saved our workers quite a lot of time. What we [Women Centre] do very well is the emotional support and the understanding of the complexity of some women's lives." - Lead partner staff

5. Support staff and volunteers to deliver effectively

To provide effective crisis support and maintain wellbeing, staff and volunteers need to be equipped with the necessary skills, expertise and support. Volunteers and staff delivering crisis support frequently have to deal with challenging situations. People providing frontline support also require good knowledge of local services and an understanding of various crisis issues. Ensuring staff and volunteers feel supported and can access support helps build resilience and make services more sustainable.

HtC partnerships have supported staff and volunteers by:

- a) **Ensuring frontline staff have the right skills, expertise and attributes** to work with beneficiaries effectively. Providing training to deal with challenging situations can also help to support staff.
- b) **Putting wellbeing policies and practices** in place (e.g. offering supervision or counselling, ensuring staff take time off) and **emphasising the importance of setting appropriate boundaries**. It is important for policies to be practical and to keep them under review.
- c) **Involving volunteers to increase capacity** and provide more holistic support to beneficiaries. It is important to ensure volunteers have enough training and support. Some HtC projects have also involved beneficiaries as volunteers.



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Principle in practice: East End Citizens Advice involved volunteer ‘champions’ to help deliver their project. Champions usually had no prior experience and were trained to deliver effective crisis support by project workers. The training involved project workers supporting volunteers to deliver case work with close supervision initially, including through shadowing. Many volunteers went on to become qualified advisors with the project, helping to meet rising demand for the project’s services.

“The champions are indirect beneficiaries ... by working with me and training them up it builds knowledge, skills and confidence. A blessing of HtC is that we can train them and work very closely over a period of time to help them become qualified advisors.” – Lead partner staff

Sharing these principles

We are sharing these principles to help organisations delivering or planning crisis support services, as well as funders considering how to fund these services. The principles are designed to be relevant across a range of service delivery models and for organisations who work with different beneficiaries.

We would like to thank all HtC partnerships who helped develop these principles by sharing their experiences of delivering crisis support with the LSE team. Special thanks to all who attended the two-part online event on effective service delivery held in March 2021 and who took part in in-depth case studies:

Better Leeds Communities

Birmingham Mind

Birmingham Rathbone

Brentwood Middleton Day Centre

Cambridge Crisis Network

Citizens Advice Coventry

Citizens Advice East End

Citizens Advice Hull & East Riding

Citizens Advice Lancashire West

Citizens Advice Luton

Citizens Advice Mid Norfolk

Citizens Advice Telford & The Wrekin

Community Links Trust

Fiscus North

Gipton Supported Independent Living

KeyRing – Living Support Networks

Manchester Mind

Mancroft Advice Project

Mencap Liverpool

Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind

North East Law Centre Ltd.

Oasis Community Housing

Re:store Northampton

The Bond Board

The Freedom Centre

The YOU Trust

Wai Yin Society

Women Centre Halifax

Further information

Additional resources are available on the [HtC document library](#).

If you have any comments or questions about this document, please get in touch with the Learning, Support and Evaluation team using the email address below.

helpthroughcrisis@ipsos.com