Help through Crisis

End of Programme Events 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 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 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 document summarises the presentations and discussions that took place during three separate End of Programme events. Each event included presentations focused on a specific topic relevant to the HtC programme (as outlined below). The discussions held between partnerships at each event also covered many similar themes. This document provides an overview of the themes that were discussed across all three events.
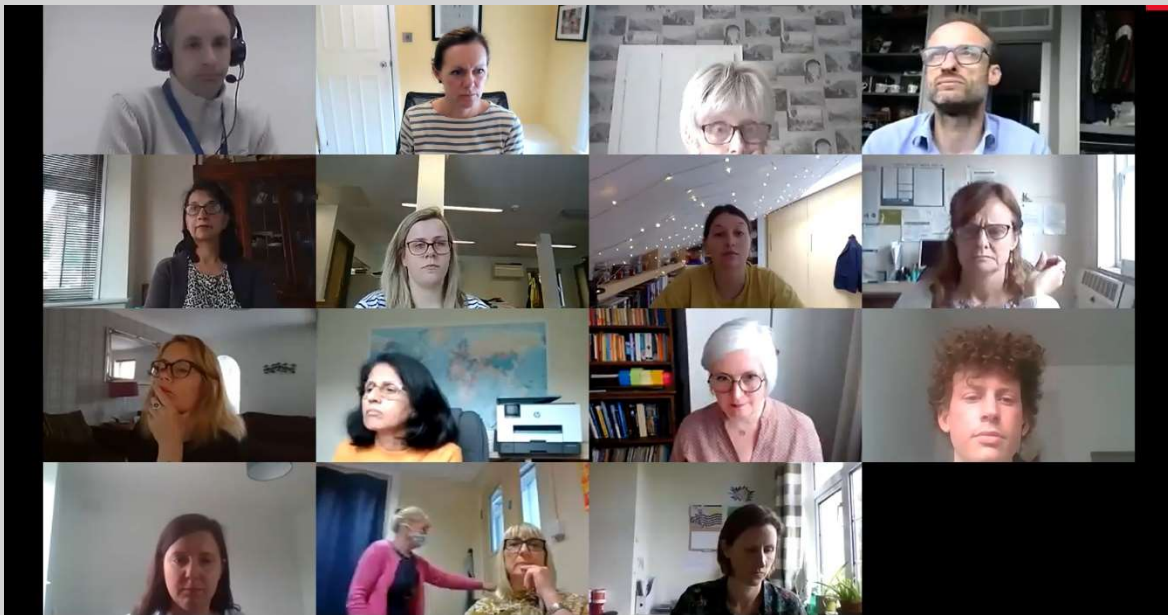
1. Introduction

In June and July 2021 the LSE team held a series of End of Programme events that focused on different aspects of the HtC programme:

- Part One: 18 June – **Celebration event focused on the core delivery of HtC projects**
- Part Two: 29 June – **Beneficiary involvement**
- Part Three: 7 July – **Sustainability and legacy**

Part One ran for two hours and Parts Two and Three ran for one hour each. All events were held virtually on Zoom and were facilitated by Hopkins Van Mil. The number of attendees at each event is outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Number of participants/partnerships attending each event

Event	Number of participants	Number of partnerships
Part One: Celebration event	23	22
Part Two: Beneficiary Involvement	12	10
Part Three: Sustainability and Legacy	9	8

Attendees from The Fund and Ipsos MORI were present at all three events.

In addition to providing partnerships an opportunity to network, the sessions aimed to:

- Provide an opportunity for all involved to celebrate the programme's achievements;
- Share learning related to the final LSE team outputs (around partnership working, effective service delivery, beneficiary involvement and sustainability and legacy); and
- Reflect on what partnerships were most proud of from their HtC project and share what has worked well for them, including hopes for the future of crisis support.

2. Summary of presentations at End of Programme events

HtC partnership and beneficiary presentations

Part One: *18 June – Celebration event focused on the core delivery of HtC projects*

Speaker 1: Jo Jobling from WomenCentre - Women Making Changes, Calderdale

- Jo spoke about WomenCentre's project working with women with complex needs. Her presentation included some context on the project: two in three women who they support have experienced domestic abuse and one in five have attempted suicide. Jo noted that the complexity of needs among people they support has increased over the five-year period of the HtC project.
- The main benefits of the HtC funding, from WomenCentre's perspective, were:
  - **Facilitating building strong partnerships** with other organisations that have experience of working with benefits, domestic abuse survivors, asylum seekers and drug and alcohol support services. HtC has helped enabled this through the programme's focus on partnership working and the multi-year funding that has allowed time for strong relationships to develop.
    - HtC has led to the WomenCentre establishing a partnership with Citizens Advice. Through this partnership, WomenCentre have a dedicated Citizens Advice contact who can provide immediate help to beneficiaries in moments of crisis.
  - Allowing **time to build trust with beneficiaries** through a reflective approach to understand their choices, behaviours and context.
- The project's evaluation has shown a reduction in levels of anxiety experienced by beneficiaries, leading to a greater ability to cope with day-to-day tasks.

Speaker 2: Maureen Holmes and a beneficiary from Ravenscliffe Community Association – Free From Crisis, Bradford

- Maureen spoke about Ravenscliffe Community Association's Free from Crisis project, supporting people experiencing food poverty, including offering a 'pay what you can' café.
- A beneficiary from the project spoke powerfully about how the project helped them build confidence and feel more hopeful about the future.

"It's helped me become a better person. I'm more confident than what I used to be. It's made my life more stable and given me hope for the future." - Beneficiary of the Ravenscliffe Community Association Free from Crisis project

- The main benefits of the HtC funding, from Ravenscliffe Community Association's perspective, were:
  - Learning how to **integrate beneficiary and wider voices** into the project:
    - Maureen highlighted how the project had adapted a 'you (beneficiary) said, we (project) did'. She presented a graphic that showed how the project had actioned beneficiary feedback.
    - The project conducted outreach through knocking on local residents' doors to ask for ideas for how the project could be improved. This resulted in more offers to volunteer from the local community.
  - Being able to commission support to **measure and evaluate** performance:
    - Using a database system provided by the charity specialist Lamplight to capture the visits and activities of all centre users.
    - Using a 'Ladder of Change' model to measure impact, which involves asking beneficiaries to score their confidence, wellbeing, and ability to cope at the start and end of their involvement with the project.
    - Robust and positive performance measures developed during the course of the HtC project, combined with the outputs from the database system and Ladder of Change model, helped the project win additional funding from other sources.

Speaker 3: Andy Coish and a beneficiary from Hull and East Riding Citizens Advice Bureau - The Breakthrough Project

- Andy spoke about The Breakthrough Project. This provides support and advice to people who: are facing financial crisis (including people who do not have a safe place to sleep or food to eat); need advice to help solve their problems (such as benefits or housing issues); may struggle to act on the advice provided without extra support.
- Andy highlighted that the biggest issue facing the project in the past year has been **housing,** due to difficulties caused by the pandemic.

- A beneficiary of The Breakthrough Project shared his story and explained how the project had supported him in his time of crisis:
  - He described how a relationship breakdown had led to homelessness, financial hardship and attempted suicide. He credited the project with helping him to **engage with support services** (including the local authority homeless team) and **supporting him to find accommodation** (including support to get a bond for a deposit and furniture). He described feeling hopeful about the future.

"Financially I was in turmoil: I'd rang mental health services [and] no one was willing to listen, no one had time, I went to see my GP, they referred me back to mental health. It was a constant triangle. I didn't want to be here, Citizens' Advice helped me build back up." *- Beneficiary of The Breakthrough Project*

LSE team presentations

Following the presentations by HtC partnerships and beneficiaries at the first End of Programme event, the LSE team presented an overview of two recent outputs focused on the core delivery of HtC projects. These reports can be found on The Fund's website by clicking on the links below:

- [Effective partnership working during Help through Crisis and beyond](#)
- [Principles of effective service delivery](#)

Part Two and Three of the End of Programme events included additional presentations from the LSE team followed by discussions between partnerships. For Part Two, the LSE team presented a summary of their learning paper on involving beneficiaries. For Part Three, the LSE team presented a summary of their learning paper on sustainability and legacy. As above, both of these reports can be found on The Fund's website by clicking on the links below:

- [Involving beneficiaries](#)
- [Sustainability and legacy](#)

The rest of this report summarises the discussions that took place between partnerships across the three End of Programme events.

3. Key themes from HtC partnerships' discussions

The following section summarises the key points of discussion from all three End of Programme events. The themes discussed were as follows:

- Being flexible and adapting to changing circumstances
- Delivering person-centred support
- Partnership working and local networks
- The importance of beneficiary involvement
- Ways HtC partnerships have supported beneficiaries
- The future of HtC projects and how activities can be sustained

3.1 Being flexible and adapting to changing circumstances

"Clients won't always meet your expectations because of what's happening in their lives and other urgent situations. So [you need to think] how you can be flexible around that to support somebody's different challenges in their life at that time." - Lead partner staff

Partnerships described flexibility and responsiveness as essential aspects of delivering crisis support. Some partnerships highlighted a need for those delivering crisis support to 'let go' of any preconceived expectations about what beneficiaries should be doing and achieving. Partnerships thought it was important for staff to accept that working with people with challenging life circumstances often means progress is not straightforward: there will be some backward steps and steps forward may be small.

Other partnerships spoke about the need to adapt beneficiary expectations of how quickly crises can be resolved. Partnerships described an expectation among some beneficiaries that staff would be able to quickly deal with their crisis by providing one-off support. In practice, most beneficiaries who ask for help with a single issue have several needs that partnerships are able to help with. In these situations partnerships have taken the time to encourage beneficiaries to think beyond their immediate crisis and work with them to help address any wider needs.

Partnerships recognise flexibility is needed when working with partners, both those who are part of the HtC programme and wider partners. The five year length of the HtC programme meant that some partner organisations, especially those who rely on shorter term funding, have undergone organisational changes that have impacted partnership working (for example when organisations restructure, change their outlook or there is personnel change). These changes within partner organisations have required HtC partnerships to respond flexibly and adapt their ways of working with partners.

The pandemic meant that flexibility became even more important. Many partnerships have significantly adapted how they deliver support, including moving previously face to face activities online. While

flexing services has been a challenge, many partnerships spoke about the benefits associated with changes they had made in response to Covid-19. For example, some partnerships reported that moving to email and WhatsApp interactions with some younger beneficiaries has led to more in-depth and thoughtful interactions than previously achieved in face-to-face sessions. Others spoke about the value of posting information about their project on social media. Some partnerships said this had inspired more conversations about what beneficiaries want from projects and led to them receiving a broader range of opinions from beneficiaries.

3.2 Delivering person-centred support

"[The] holistic and person-centred approach ... make[s] sure that we are able to meet needs ... depending on what clients want and how quickly they need [it]." - Lead partner staff

Offering meaningful, person-centred support is one of five principles for effective service delivery developed by the LSE team in partnership with HtC partnerships following online events held in March 2021 (see Principles of Effective Service Delivery output as per above). Partnerships offered many reflections on this theme during the End of Programme events and discussed what helps them to deliver person-centred support.

Partnerships saw effective, person-centred crisis support as providing both practical and emotional help. For example, practical support could involve providing a mobile phone for beneficiaries to keep in touch with project staff, or a bus ticket to get to an appointment. Emotional support and encouragement, often delivered in tandem with practical support, can help beneficiaries become more resilient and better able to deal with their crisis.

Some partnerships described how they had evolved from an organisation that fixed things *for* people to one that works *with* people, helping beneficiaries to take more responsibility for their journey out of crisis. For example, some partnerships described shifting from delivering support by filling out forms for beneficiaries, to working with beneficiaries to provide support while they complete forms themselves.

Another partnership described how their organisation had a weekly team meeting where each member of staff would talk about their interactions with beneficiaries. Sharing experiences in this way meant that staff were able to further their understanding of the range of beneficiaries' needs and make changes to the services they provided to meet these needs. This partnership also highlighted the example of setting up an emergency fund to provide small amounts of financial support to beneficiaries for things that were having a big impact on their lives (such as providing train fares for health appointments or job interviews).

3.3 Partnership working and local networks

"Partnership working and collaboration is so important, because you get caught up in your own point of view and when you're working collaboratively, you have to learn to listen as an organisation to others." - Lead partner staff

Partnerships discussed what they had learnt about the challenges and successes of partnership working during the HtC programme. One of the benefits of long-term partnerships established through HtC was developing strong trust-based relationships. Tangible benefits of trust-based relationships include improved referral processes and ensuring beneficiaries are fully supported as they move between different organisations.

Another identified benefit of partnership working was the opportunity to learn from the different strengths and skills of partner organisations. Some partnerships experienced working with organisations with very different strengths to their own organisation. By the end of the programme, some HtC partnerships had been able to embed some of the activities that wider partners were doing well. One partnership described a 'good skills swap' between them and a partner organisation. The partnership had made good progress with co-production during the HtC programme, while one of their wider local partners had particularly robust policies and procedures related to partnership working in place. The organisations were able to learn from each other based on their respective strengths.

Other learning about partnership working included recognising the importance of partners' different values and priorities. One HtC partnership that faced difficulties early on in the HtC programme recommended discussing these upfront to help ensure partner organisations are aligned on the values and priorities of the project, including with frontline staff as well as managers. Partnerships also talked about the importance of having appropriate Service Level Agreements in place and responding flexibly to changes within partner organisations.

Lastly, partnerships gave examples of how they had worked with partners to increase their advocacy work:

"Part of [our project] was to do some more strategic work of developing a food poverty network and alliance locally. Through that, we did some key lobbying and advocacy work that has contributed and helped to result in (the area's) first anti-poverty strategy ... we were also able to work with the local paper to raise awareness about food poverty, food insecurity, challenging negative stereotypes and narratives about people who find themselves in hardship." – Lead partner staff

3.4 Beneficiary involvement

"I think in the last few years especially, we've really looked at co-production and really getting that onto the agenda, what that is and promoting it... We've managed to establish a group, an influencer's group, which is to influence decisions that affect people and their own lives and getting that beneficiary voice out there." - *Lead partner staff*

"Once we'd helped them with a food bank voucher, sorted out some utilities with them, they didn't want to come to groups or anything like that. These are people in such crisis it was just too much for them." - *Lead partner staff*

In the discussions, partnerships shared a range of experiences of beneficiary involvement, with some reporting more progress than others.

1.1.1 Successes of beneficiary involvement work

Many partnerships said that their experience and confidence in involving beneficiaries had developed over time. Some partnerships reported making significant progress in involving beneficiaries in service development, including incorporating beneficiary voices into funding bids.

A common approach was to involve beneficiaries in stakeholder meetings. Partnerships mentioned a range of these kinds of activities that beneficiaries had been involved in, from presentations at local authority staff events and partnership meetings, to participation in virtual engagement sessions. One partnership described how beneficiaries joined a Zoom meeting with Princess Anne. These activities involved beneficiaries sharing their stories, either live / in person, or as a recording, which were described by partnerships as very powerful. Partnerships said the former (live / in person) was more effective for all involved, particularly because beneficiaries had the opportunity to hear positive feedback from other attendees, which boosted their confidence.

Some partnerships emphasised that, in their experience, involving a small number of engaged beneficiaries can be more effective and valuable than trying to engage large groups of less engaged beneficiaries. Partnerships highlighted how running small beneficiary groups helped shape services.

Partnerships embedded beneficiary involvement in a variety of ways within their organisational service delivery, including by:

- **Obtaining funding for a community engagement manager.** Their role was to involve beneficiaries by encouraging them to tell their stories and subsequently build awareness of the support available, and how helpful support was, among people in similar situations.

- **Collecting suggestions from beneficiaries to improve the project and the experience of beneficiaries engaging with it.** One recent example was a partnership that had developed a

'Top 10 Life Hacks' produced with project beneficiaries and shared with other beneficiaries. Another partnership had increased the presence of user voices on their website. This helped increase the relevance of their website for potential beneficiaries and communicate the role of the project to stakeholders (including potential funders and partners).

- **Developing systematic ways to capture beneficiaries' experiences that summed up the work of the project.** For example, one partnership described how feedback provided by beneficiaries through emails, phone calls and social media was logged and themed for easy reference and use in funding applications.

A common theme was the importance of informal approaches to involving beneficiaries and emphasising the value of these to different stakeholders within an organisation. Partnerships described wanting to empower their teams 'on the ground' to feel confident to facilitate a conversation with beneficiaries to capture their feedback and ensure that it is fed back to the organisation. Partnerships were keen to highlight that beneficiary involvement doesn't have to be only about formal meetings.

1.1.2 Challenges of beneficiary involvement work

While partnerships shared success stories, they also discussed challenges associated with beneficiary involvement during event discussions.

One challenge centred around engaging beneficiaries in beneficiary involvement work and the difficulty of involving people in the midst of a crisis. Partnerships reported that some beneficiaries found it hard to engage with requests for feedback or participation when they were overwhelmed with day-to-day challenges. Some beneficiaries have felt ashamed of their crisis experience and were reluctant to continue engaging with the project once their initial immediate crisis had been resolved, thus limiting the potential for them to be involved. This is especially relevant for activities that involve beneficiaries sharing their personal experiences. One partnership gave the example about how they had hoped to involve someone who had suddenly been made unemployed. This person had not eaten for five days and, for the first time in their life, had to seek help and ask for food. However, when asked if they would share their story, they said they were too embarrassed. In these cases, beneficiaries may be more likely to take part in less personal beneficiary involvement activities, such as providing feedback on how the project could be improved or suggesting new ideas.

Another challenge around beneficiary involvement was staff capacity. Some partnerships from smaller organisations said they did not have the staff time available to focus on some beneficiary involvement activities which they thought would be useful for their organisation. One of the activities mentioned in this discussion was development of beneficiary case studies, which partnerships have identified as valuable in making the case for funding for crisis support. For example, one partnership described the process of developing case studies (identifying the individual, gathering their story, creating beneficiary case studies, checking it with the individual and disseminating it) as something that was not within their capacity to undertake.

Covid-19 was also discussed as a key challenge to beneficiary involvement. Partnerships explained that they had struggled to maintain momentum with beneficiary involvement groups while moving them online during the pandemic.

3.5 Ways HtC partnerships have supported beneficiaries

Many partnerships shared powerful stories about beneficiaries whose lives have been changed through the crisis support delivered as part of the HtC programme. Partnerships have helped beneficiaries address their crises in many different ways through the support they have provided. Some examples shared in the event discussions are included here in partnerships' own words.

Supporting beneficiaries to find accommodation:

"We helped a client who was deemed not to be vulnerable by the local authority. We picked him up discharged from hospital, put him into a hotel for a few nights while we got some things sorted out with the emergency fund that we had attached to the project. He is now in private rented accommodation and working. He was going to be on the streets ... sometimes that direct intervention in a crisis, if we hadn't been there I dread to think what would have happened to that particular client. "

"[For one beneficiary] I liaised with the council, who we formed really good links with out of this project, brought the council into the GP surgery which was a familiar setting for this client. It was in December, it was snowing that night, and we were able to get him off the streets and into accommodation that night. I then stayed in contact with him, he got into some proper accommodation and six months later was able to come back, and I did a class award with him for local assistance for some white goods."

Supporting and advocating for families in the social care system:

"I think for us, one of the areas where we've managed to advocate particularly well is with families who are on Child in Need or Child Protection Plans to do a lot of emotional work with parents, to really improve that relationship and to help them to focus on their situation and improving the relationship with their social work, to really reduce that defensiveness often which is expressed in situations like that. We've had quite a lot of success there but it does take time and it takes a bit of unpicking with parents to understand that sometimes that comes from a place of quite a lot of trauma. We often find that the more work we do, the more complexity is uncovered. We've de-escalated situations where there was a risk of children being removed to a much more stable situation for the family."

3.6 Sustainability and legacy

"This has been a really fantastic project, it needs other funders to pick it up. It needs, on a national basis, the Lottery shouting, 'this has been really good. Local authorities or other funders should pick this up. This is a really important model.'" - Lead partner staff

"That security of funding is so vital, because otherwise those working on the project get pulled off and distracted in trying to bring in other funding, rather than focusing on how to tweak the project to make it better." - Lead partner staff

As HtC funding comes to an end in 2021, partnerships reflected on the legacy of the HtC programme and the future of their activities. The value of the five-year funding period of HtC was a core benefit of the overall programme consistently highlighted as valuable by partnerships. Long-term funding was described as key to facilitating long lasting change for both organisations and beneficiaries, and helping to address the causes of crises.

Partnerships highlighted several benefits of the long-term approach to crisis support, including:

- The ability to adapt and adjust service delivery based on experience and feedback, to improve support given to beneficiaries.

- Providing stability to build a strong staff and volunteer team and strong relationships with community partners.

- Giving staff and volunteers the time to focus on project work and supporting beneficiaries rather than being preoccupied with funding applications.

- Having the confidence to try new ways of working and time to adapt and refine over time.

- Enabling long-term support for beneficiaries, which has helped to build trust and resilience. Partnerships said having regular check-in points, informed by an understanding of the individual beneficiary and how frequently they might need support, has helped keep beneficiaries on track to move out of their crisis.

- The opportunity to reflect on and revise objectives and approaches to crisis support, for example through focusing on enabling people to better respond to any future crises they may face rather than only dealing with the immediate crisis.

Several partnerships spoke of the need for research and evaluation to demonstrate what they perceived to be the overall, long-term 'savings' of crisis support projects (like those funded through HtC) to public services. Some partnerships reported that, through demonstrating the value of long-term funding (e.g. through evaluation), they have attracted more long-term funding from other sources.

The HtC programme's focus on partnership working and local networks (that can provide local knowledge and relevant expertise) was seen as essential for creating sustainable and effective crisis support projects in the future. One partnership described how they are evolving their service following

the end of the programme by replacing drop-ins at their local office with 'Client Hubs' in various community locations focusing on providing financial education. Computers and advisers will be available to help clients to do cost comparisons between utility providers or a universal credit application. The overall aim of this service is to build resilience. The partnership has drawn from their own learning, gathered through evaluation activities, about the causes of recurrent crisis. This learning recognises the importance of beneficiaries feeling more confident in their own abilities which lessens reliance on drop-in services in the long-term.

Partnerships also spoke about the fundamental societal changes needed to achieve long-lasting solutions to the emotional and financial crises experienced by increasing numbers of beneficiaries. Many partnerships outlined the difficulty of providing support and advice services in the context of cuts to frontline services, such as to Legal Aid and local authority support. However, partnerships acknowledged that funding alone cannot address all the issues, and described the need to change systems and structures to effect long-term change and ensure that support is consistent.

"If the pathways through crisis keep changing... every 2 or 3 years ... you've never got a consistent, sustainable route...through the myriad of services for people. So we've got all these amazing people including the people here today, who are devoted to this service, but they're constantly having to shift roles or shift projects and re-learn who the best contacts are every few years to achieve the same end results." Lead partner staff

4. Summary of learning from the End of Programme events

The discussions from the three End of Programme events were rich in detail and highlighted a number of key learnings about HtC partnerships' experiences of being part of the programme. These included:

- **The importance of delivering person-centred support**: the value of practical, emotional and ongoing person-centred support to help beneficiaries deal with crises more effectively in the future.
- **The need to be flexible and adapt effectively to changing circumstances**: being flexible and responsive to changes within the sector, within partnerships, or in terms of changes to beneficiaries' needs – and ensuring that any expectations of beneficiaries are realistic and flexible.
- **The benefits of strong relationships with partners and wider local networks**: HtC partnerships viewed the emphasis on partnership working as a core strength of the HtC programme. Partnerships reported learning from the organisations directly involved with HtC, as well as benefitting from the skills and experience of wider partners locally. Strong partnerships also bring significant benefits to beneficiaries by improving the support they receive.

- **Learning around how to effectively engage beneficiaries**: recognising the importance of beneficiary involvement and learning about how to do this in practice – for example by identifying the right moment to capture beneficiaries' stories or experiences.
- **The value of five year funding**: the significant value of long-term funding and the range of benefits this has brought to HtC partnerships and beneficiaries. Partnerships highlighted benefits including supporting staff development and the ability to adapt and learn to improve services for beneficiaries.

LSE team thanks and next steps

The LSE team would like to thank everyone who took part in the End of Programme events for sharing their experiences, especially those partnerships and beneficiaries who presented at the sessions. We are grateful to all who found time to take part in the events during the challenges of the pandemic. We also hope these summaries provide a useful source of reference and inspiration to those partnerships who couldn't take part because of other demands on their time.

These final events mark the end of a series of activities conducted by the LSE team with HtC partnerships over the course of the programme. While these events signal the end of the partnership support element of the LSE team's role, we will continue to play a role in disseminating learnings from the HtC programme. We are working in partnership with The Fund to ensure the experiences of partnerships are shared with the wider crisis support sector as far as possible.