

STATE OF THE VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) SURVEY

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

1. Introduction

CVA, the BME Forum, CNCA and ARCC conducted a short survey in August this year, which was completed by 87 local VCS groups, on the impact of Covid19 on their organisations and beneficiaries. The results are presented in the graphs and data at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-2Q63TZ8Y/>

As was the case elsewhere in the country, community organisations were caught during the crisis in between the need to respond quickly to an unprecedented increase in demand for their services and the need to manage the financial constraints impacting on their capacity to function and survive into 2021.

2. Financial and HR Constraints

Most of the organisations that took part in the survey (55 out of 87) were small, well established local groups with an annual income lower than £50,000 holding either no reserves or no more than 5 months' worth. Many of these groups were positive they would have to draw on their reserves because of the crisis, with some highlighting how, having had to use reserves for the last two years to plug gaps in funding, they were expecting to run out of cash by 2021.

'Planning for recovery', 'Funding access for new needs' and 'Funding sustainability' were amongst the top 5 challenges faced during the outbreak, and with the cancellation of regular fundraising events and donations being reduced, as one of the groups surveyed highlights, there is a strong sense of uncertainty abroad in the sector.

"We have lost all unrestricted income sources - this leads us to be very reliant on contracts. These are currently under pressure. This will lead to loss of opportunities for us to develop services that we believe are needed but not funded by LA/CCG etc."

The increase in demand for services was acted on despite significant HR challenges. More groups lost (37.04%) rather than gained (20.37%) volunteers, with older, longer term volunteers having to shield and self-isolate and others finding it hard to adapt to a totally different delivery model. Existing staff were stretched to the maximum, with 42.59% of the 54 respondents to this question stating that all their staff were still working and 27.78% highlighting the increase in unpaid hours. 31.48% of staff were furloughed and 9.26% made redundant.

"Our staff team is close to burn out due to extra hours worked and the demand for our services. Running out of funding fast and it's hard to write bids when you have only 4 members of staff that deliver to over 130 residents a week and rising. Keeping up with daily changes and guidance is hard".

"It will take us at least a year to return to full service. We will lose many volunteers, or not be allowed to utilise them anymore due to age or vulnerability, so we will lose a crucial part of our workforce. It will take time for us to be able to offer enough appointments in a day to be financially viable, as we will have to pay therapists for 2 hours, for every 1 hour appointment, due to the required hours gap between member appointments."

3. Opportunities

Managing through the pandemic has been a learning curve for the sector and there are many benefits that will hopefully be further explored in the future:

- The crisis allowed the VCS to show its flexibility and ability to adapt quickly
- It has encouraged all sectors to come together even more to work in partnership for the benefit of residents
- It has showcased some of the services that are a specialism of the sector - as long term solutions that should be invested in
- It has encouraged groups to embrace the digital world and social media more, with many using Zoom and other online platform to communicate with both beneficiaries and partners

"Covid 19 has had a profound effect on everyone and a devastating effect on many, relating to loss of someone close, or difficulties relating to work or many other reasons. Some people have suffered with their Mental Health or been unable to cope with the isolation and/or restrictions. However what is certain, is that so many people have volunteered to help others who are less able and may have a disability, be elderly, infirm or shielding. This has been a very difficult time but all over Croydon people have been offering so much by way of support. This in itself is very heart warming. It does not matter whether it's a regular telephone call to chat, or assistance to shop for provisions, prescription collections, or some simple telephone advice to point someone in the right direction if in need of help/support. Voluntary support is of vital importance to many, and from what I have seen locals have pulled out all the stops to assist ,support and monitor people in the community."

"It has been great to see the VCS and local authority working in partnership to support Croydon residents. Next steps - a collaboration to shape services ('the new now'), focusing on prevention, sharing of resources and adding value approach."

"It shows that intensive mentoring is a long-term strategy that is effective in building relationships with vulnerable clients."

4. Meeting Demand

VCS groups rose to the challenge and sprang into action to support their residents by quickly and radically changing their services, adapting to working remotely online and working longer hours unpaid. Indeed, during the Covid19 outbreak most of these groups found themselves having to support about the same or a higher number of residents (42.59% reported a higher or much higher number of beneficiaries). They were responding to a range of needs, not least employment and poverty, digital connectivity, mental health, isolation & loneliness and grief & bereavement. For example:

- Access to food - 77.14% of the 48 groups that replied to the question confirmed a higher or much higher number of people asking for help in this area
- Debt issues - 80% confirmed a higher or much higher number of people seeking support in this area

Detailed percentages and numbers are shown in the graphs at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-2Q63TZ8Y/> (the password is cvalive!)