

VCSE development needs identified at the start of first national lockdown

This research review set out to answer three questions about the initial impact of COVID-19 on the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in Bristol:

1. What emerging development needs have VCSE organisations identified?
2. What resources, support and skills does the VCSE sector require to address these needs?
3. Given the upcoming recession, what kinds of community assets and approaches should the VCSE sector seek to use?

Voscur gathered national, regional and local research published between April and June 2020 to summarise emerging issues relevant to local organisations.

1. The things people mentioned most often as development needs (and some of the changes causing them) were:
 - Significant loss of income.
 - Reduced workforce capacity.
 - Increased demand for services.
 - Adapting to work in a COVID-safe environment.
 - Digital skills, equipment and services.
 - Increase in existing inequalities.
 - Loss or closure of VCSE sector services.
 - Capacity-building and coordination for recovery.
 - Impact on service users.
2. As well as revenue funding, the resources required to tackle emerging needs were:
 - Increased digital skills and capacity.
 - Collaboration and merger support.
 - Support with contingency planning, recovery and adapting services or venues.
 - Extra infrastructure support.
 - Human Resources, employment law and legal advice.
 - Funding application guidance.
 - Sector representation and advocacy.
 - Access to temporary or volunteer help.
 - Management support.
 - Getting service users more involved.

3. The community assets and approaches seen as most useful to sector recovery were:

- Adaptability to new challenges, as shown by our emergency response.
- New local collaborations, stronger relationships and creative working.
- Streamlined processes and reduced barriers to working in partnership.
- Improved information sharing and sector communications and image.
- Relationship-based collaborative funding or commissioning.
- More trust in communities, between organisations and with decision-makers.
- Community spirit shown by Mutual Aid and other community volunteer groups
- Insight into disadvantaged communities; understanding how inequalities are linked.
- Strengthened existing social infrastructure and community connections for resilience
- Increased value of the VCSE sector as part of a strategic approach.

This review has emphasized the profound and potentially long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the VCSE sector, and the substantial resources and support that will be required to reduce the challenges faced, and aid sector recovery and adaptation. It has also highlighted the range of community assets, strengths and connections that VCSE organisations have to draw upon, and the crucial role they have played (and are still playing) to support communities during the pandemic.

This crisis has seen the VCSE sector in Bristol and across the country step up to respond to new needs and community action, by developing new ways of working and forging new partnerships across sectors. Because of this, the vital role of VCSE organisations and their networks has been recognized and strengthened: the sector now has a unique opportunity to take up a more central, strategic and trusted position in local recovery and decision-making. Voscur is well placed to support this sector development and empowerment in Bristol, and will also feed the findings of this review into a comprehensive VCSE sector support strategy over the next three years.

Further questions to explore in future research, prompted by reflecting on these findings, include:

- Will VCSE sector trading income eventually recover, and will it become more difficult to secure fundraising income?
- Will future VCSE sector services adapt more permanently to online delivery?
- Will charities be offered opportunities to take over and repurpose closed commercial assets (e.g. shops, pubs or commercial spaces)?
- Will organisations exploring mergers be driven by the clear benefits of working together, or as a way to avoid closure?
- Can the resilience and resourcefulness of communities be relied on to plug gaps in future emergency responses if each wave combines the social and economic damage of the previous phase?

Priority VCSE sector development needs and suggested responses

Development Needs	Proposed Responses
<p>1. Significant loss of income</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resilience, contingency and recovery planning. • Digital fundraising (skills, software, tools and techniques). • Digital capacity for online donations¹ (e.g. website upgrade). • Regular funding updates. • Making grant applications. • Tailored small organisation support². • Tailored support for those reliant on traded income (50% +), e.g. community centres, cafes or social enterprises. • Building on new COVID partnerships, e.g. local authority/NHS/funders.
<p>2. Reduced workforce capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlining services: maximise your reach with reduced income and staffing. • Service redesign that meets pre-agreed funder outputs and outcomes. • Restructuring. • Maintaining quality standards of services. • Recruiting skilled volunteers. • Volunteer retention, guidance and support. • HR and legal – redundancies, policies, contracts, etc. • Peer networks for VCSE sector leaders or managers. • Partnerships and mergers. • Staff support: burnout, morale, increased workloads and the impact on health and wellbeing.
<p>3. Increased demand for services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting skilled volunteers: tap into new pools, e.g. NHS COVID-19 volunteers. • Remodelling service delivery. • Helping Mutual Aid groups develop into formal organisations (focus on community support gaps and areas of deprivation). • Developing the skills of small organisations to help with remote working. • Prioritising high-risk, vulnerable groups and COVID emerging issues: reaching out to new clients and groups disproportionately affected by COVID-19, e.g. over 65s, Black and Asian communities/citizens, the vulnerable, homeless, and refugees. • Engaging more service users in the workforce, as volunteers or staff, to improve their representation. • Addressing the more multi-layered or complex needs of service users.

¹ 1 in 10 charities can't afford the technology to accept online donations

'CAF Charity Coronavirus Briefing: 3 months into lockdown, how are charities in the UK faring?' /CAF (June 2020)

² 1 in 8 orgs with a turnover of less than £100K are at highest risk of closure

'CAF Charity Coronavirus Briefing: 3 months into lockdown, how are charities in the UK faring?' /CAF (June 2020)

<p>4. Working in a COVID-safe environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting work environments to be COVID-safe. • Meeting costs of COVID-19 hygiene measures, PPE and IT systems. • Social distancing – adapting venues. • Guidance on reducing risk to COVID-19 exposure. • Contingency planning for local lockdowns, second/third wave, or COVID-19 cases in your organisation. • Risk management. • Safeguarding.
<p>5. Digital skills, equipment and services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and volunteer training. • Strategies to reduce the worsening digital divide (particularly in hard to reach groups or poverty barriers). • Extra funding for IT equipment and software costs. • Developing a digital strategy.
<p>6. Amplification of existing inequalities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving Black and Asian community leadership and workforce representation in the sector. • Addressing racism in the sector. • Making sure that VCSE sector support services meet the needs of people disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and the recession. • Providing tailored sector support to Black and Asian communities and citizens.
<p>7. Capacity building and coordination for recovery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local VCSE sector support hubs: Councils of Voluntary Service (CVS) have been identified as an essential sector support resource during the pandemic. • Maintaining and raising the Bristol VCSE sector profile, to be seen as part of mainstream local services, e.g. via local authority, the media, and social media. • Major sector representation in a campaigning and influencing role. • Mapping and promoting wider sector support initiatives, e.g. NCVO legal and HR helplines or webinars. • Avoid duplicating support – instead, tailor support to local needs. • Ensuring VCSE sector is a major part of Bristol’s economic recovery plan and local economic recovery. • Asset transfers.
<p>8. Loss/closure of VCSE services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting service users as VCSE organisations close or reduce their services. • Tackling additional barriers faced by Black and Asian communities or citizens, e.g. self-isolating, a higher COVID-19 risk, and limited services tailored to their needs.
<p>9. Service user impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing gaps in services and waiting lists due to reduced supply and increased demand. • Streamlining services. • Ensuring nobody in the community is ‘left behind’.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing and prioritising support for specific priority groups.• Developing community and family resilience.
10. Brexit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparing VCSE organisations for the upcoming changes and impacts of Brexit, e.g. employment laws.

Appendix: Data Reference Sources

No	Research Document	Report by	No of VCSE Surveyed	Date
1.	State of the Sector 2020	NPC	300	May 2020
2.	Covid-19 State of the Sector Summary	Support Staffordshire	134	May 2020
3	Survey of Charities and Community Groups	Cambridge CVS	108	April 2020
4	North East VCSE Sector Covid-19 Impact Survey	Voluntary Organisations' Network North East	404	May 2020
5.	Impact on the charity sector during coronavirus	Probono Economics	261	16-17 th June 2020
6.	DCMS Select Committee: COVID-19 impact on the social enterprise sector	Social Enterprise UK	71	April 2020
7.	Bristol Children and Young People's Voluntary and Community Sector Response to Covid 19 and Sector Resilience to Meet Future Needs	Learning Partnership West	18 Bristol CYP Leaders	April 2020
8.	Getting Ready for Fallout (37 charities)	IVAR	37	April 2020
9.	UK Heritage Sector Survey	National Lottery	1250	
10.	Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Led Businesses, Organisations & Communities	Black South West Network	60 Business + Community Organisations (29 VCSE)	May 2020
11.	Impact of COVID on BAME VCSE	The Ubele Initiative	165	April 2020
12.	SCC Survey	Small Charities Coalition	Not stated	Not stated
13.	Charity Finance Survey	Charity Finance Group	Charity Finance Index 100	May 2020
14	The Covid-19 crisis and charities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019–21	House of Commons: Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee	N/A	June 2020
15	Impact on the charity sector during coronavirus	Institute of Fundraising Charity Finance Group & NCVO	230	June 2020
16	Charities Responding to Covid 19	Lloyds Bank Foundation	300	May 2020
17	Charity Digital Skills Report 2020	Skills Platform	346	May 2020

18	Home Truths: Undoing racism and delivering real diversity in the charity sector	ACEVO	500 BAME people in the sector	June 2020
19	Local Heroes: How to sustain community spirit beyond Covid-19	Power to Change / Community Fund	N/A	May 2020
20	Future of the charity sector: How do charities adapt to the impact of COVID-1	OPINIUM RESEARCH	N/A	May 2020
21	The Impact of COVID 19 on VCSE North Hants	Voluntary Impact North Hants	58	May 2020
22	The Impact of COVID 19 on Haltan & St Helens Faith Groups & VCSE	Haltan & St Helen's Community Voluntary Action	58	May 2020
23	We Were Built for This: How community organisations helped us through the coronavirus and how we can build a better future	Locality	N/A	June 2020
24	CAF Charity Coronavirus Briefing: 3 months into lockdown, how are charities in the UK faring?	CAF	Not stated	June 2020

Research: June 2020

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