

COVID-19 VCS Resilience Strategy

How the sector has responded to the pandemic, and what's needed to sustain resilience, and lay the foundations for recovery.

Background

- We recognise that as we emerge from the crisis phase, we need a joined up and co-ordinated approach for how the VCS can work together and with key partners, and that further builds and reinforces community resilience
- Hackney CVS used it's reach to canvas wider input by surveying the VCS sector. Findings highlighted urgent priorities which will need thorough consideration if plans, and the related allocation of resources, are to adequately address health inequalities which have either arisen or worsened due to COVID-19.
- The strategy will be iterative as the situation evolves, and has been informed by a range of discussions with local VCS organisations accessed via Hackney CVS's portfolio of networks, discussions with the Council and CCG, supported by feedback from neighbourhood conversations being facilitated by Hackney CVS

Underpinning principles:

To deliver this work, the following have been identified as the principles which will guide our approach:

1. Collaborative and Partnership working
2. Communications & information sharing
3. Sustainable Funding
4. Tackling inequalities
5. Building on success and innovation arising from the crisis

Strategic Objectives

Objective 1 - Support Hackney's diverse communities strive towards recovery from the impact of COVID-19, building and reinforcing resilience as the pandemic continues to evolve

- Priority 1** Identify and provide financial support to those most at risk from financial hardship
- Priority 2** Ensure fair and equitable access to services that meet practical and emotional needs for local residents, with prioritisation given to those with complex needs
- Priority 3** Identify, explore and support hidden communities e.g. LGBTQ community; People experiencing homelessness; undocumented migrants; people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse
- Priority 4** Tackling prejudice and discrimination; supporting marginalised communities e.g. disabled people, ethnically diverse communities; empowering ethnically-diverse communities to be at the forefront of change

Strategic Objectives

Objective 2 - Support Hackney's vibrant voluntary and community sector to recover from the impact of COVID-19, and build resilience

- Priority 1** Ensure VCS orgs are sustainably funded so that they can continue to exist; ensuring that capital assets and IT infrastructure are in place, and fit for purpose
- Priority 2** Build the capacity of the VCS workforce, striving for parity with public sector to support equal and equitable partnership working and collaboration
- Priority 3** Support effective partnership and collaborative working (within VCS sector, and with Public sector partners)

Strategic Objectives

Objective 3 - Align strategic priorities with public sector partners; and ensure the strategy influences relevant local initiatives

- Priority 1** Commit to open, transparent and fluid communication that allows resources to be allocated to meet the greatest need, notwithstanding our commitment to act fairly and equitably
- Priority 2** Empower the VCS sector to actively engage in local initiatives so that they continue to accurately reflect the needs of local communities, particularly those representing ethnically-diverse communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19

Objective 4 - Supporting and developing an inclusive leadership culture within the VCS, developing the workforce globally

- Priority 1** Deliver training and provide opportunities for upskilling to develop the VCS workforce; with a clear focus on addressing inequalities to fill gaps that exist within current leadership structures

Key findings from the HCVS COVID-19 VCS Recovery & Resilience sector survey (July 2020)

58% applied for funding, of which 48% have been successful - Lack of capacity noted as main reason for not applying for funding (14%), followed by lack of funding opportunities (10%)

About **fifth have seen up to a 25% cut in funding** (linked to lack of revenue (57%) followed by capacity to fundraise/funding opportunities (39%))

73% have widened networks / established new partnerships

63% reported working in partnership with VCS to be effective/equitable (58% for statutory bodies)

55% reported an increase in demand for their services

69% say they have developed new and more efficient ways of service delivery

16% are not confident in being able to meet their service user needs for the next 12 months

Regarding re-opening: **36% reported being confident in being able to adapt service delivery to meet social distancing guidelines vs 20% who did not** (remainder were unsure)

Community Conversations

1. Financial hardship challenges

Disabled people / Faith based communities / Refugee & migrant communities / working age / Low income families / Ethnically diverse communities

No recourse to public funding

- Refugee and migrant community unable to access vital funding

Redundancy / Zero hr contracts

- Concerns about falling into debt / not being able to put food on the table/ losing home

Accessing financial assistance

- DWP processes overwhelmed, resulting in delays and financial shortfalls
- Unable to pay for essential utilities, risk of phone/internet being cut off and becoming isolated / unable to access support
- Lack of digital skills impacting on ability to access online financial assistance

Impact on health

- Financial worries increasing levels of anxiety
- VCS receiving referrals for food poverty but unable to respond due to limited resources

Lone parents unable to access childcare

- Concerns from parents about what will happen if they develop virus; nervous to go out/ return to work

Unable to self-isolate e.g. if living in temporary/shared accommodation

- Needing to use shared facilities such as bathrooms / kitchens, therefore unable to self-isolate; at risk if someone they are sharing with is self-isolating

Community Conversations

1. Financial Hardship solutions

Disabled people / Faith based communities / Refugee & migrant communities / working age / Low income families / Ethnically diverse communities

- Resources for VCS organisations to increase capacity to continue food parcels, working with mutual aid groups, VCH and the Food Justice Alliance - with clear accessible messaging about how to access. A number of VCS organisations are citing they've been supporting this effort, but that it's unsustainable, whilst demand remains high
- Free or subsidised Functional Skills courses e.g. Maths Level 2, such as those provided by Hackney Works (LBH) to support people needing to retrain/ upskill to re-enter the job market
- A clear package of support for people with NRPF, which is provided via VCS organisations utilised and trusted by refugee and migrant communities
- Emergency grants for people who are awaiting the outcome of benefit claims, due to the delays within the DWP.
- Free financial advice, which is accessible in-person (where possible), online or telephone
- An extension to bans on evictions taking place under Section 21, with a longer-term deadline to provide assurances to people currently in financial hardship
- Restructuring use of shared facilities or moving vulnerable residents to ensure that those who need it have access to private bathroom and kitchen facilities e.g. if self-isolating
- Digital skills training, particularly around undertaking routine functions such as setting up an email account; attaching documents, identifying themselves as not being a robot
- Funding from LBH to be made available to VCS organisations to meet increased food poverty crisis

Community Conversations

2. Complex Needs / LTC's

Disabled people / People living with a disability / People living with dementia / Older People / Children with SEN / Children and Young People

Lack of tailored and specific government guidelines

- Lack of clarity within VCS of how to interpret guidelines for their service
- Lack of PPE, particular concern as winter approaches
- Concerns for people who rely on unpaid carers (family/friends), not been able to receive care due to lockdown - telephone/digital support cited as not been adequate
- Concerns for people with lack of access to their support network being able to adhere to guidelines

Distance learning not suitable for all children

- Children with SEN; living in stressful living conditions or in poverty, are falling behind their peers

Mental and emotional impact

- Disruption to regular routine having a disproportionate impact on people with learning disabilities
- Concerns about the long-term impact on those continuing to shield due to fear e.g. older people, and reduction in confidence to live independently
- Families / young people struggling with lockdown restrictions, leading to depression / risk of DV

Face coverings providing communication barrier for some

- People with a hearing impairment at risk of increased isolation, unable to lip-read
- A sense of being left behind, as England, unlike rest of UK, do not use sign-language interpreters at government press conferences, resulting with some needing to rely on children/family to translate, or

later bull

Community Conversations

2. Complex Needs / LTC's

Disabled people / People living with a disability / People living with dementia / Older People / Children with SEN / Children and Young People

- Improved local communication of government guidelines, and how they apply to the VCS sector, particularly in relation to what constitutes 'charitable activities' - An FAQ document was suggested, in plain English to allow for easy translation.
- Improved access to PPE, which is available for collection at accessible venue e.g. HCVS
- Volunteer befrienders, and or buddying systems need to be put in place to increase support available to people living with complex needs, to supplement care and support provided by carers, and combat isolation and loneliness, particularly amongst older people
- Personalised digital inclusion services/courses, which provide tailored support, addressing digital skills, staying safe online - it was noted that simply providing hardware and WiFi access would not
- Increased awareness of how digital technology can be adapted to the needs of people with visual and hearing impairments
- If schools are forced to close again, then consideration to Children with SEN being allowed to attend, similar to children of frontline workers during first lockdown - it was also suggested that sibling support for children with SEN should not take place in a clinical setting
- Schools and other services should check [with families] if support is needed, and work with families, ensuring mechanisms are in place where relationships between schools and families breakdown
- An audit of what was in place prior to the pandemic, and what has yet to be re-instated should be taken to identify needed and required solutions
- More clarity is needed on what support will be made available to children 16+, and those in Alternative Provision as they are at an increased risk of falling

Community Conversations

3. Parents, guardians and carers

Parents and guardians / Carers (including unpaid carers) / Families on low and uncertain incomes

Mistrust of government guidelines

- People being cared for having additional restrictions placed on them by their carers, due to carers lack of trust in government guidelines - with some parents noting a nervousness about allowing their children to return to school.

Lone parents unable to access childcare

- Due to either government restrictions, financial hardship, or fear, lone parents are concerned about how child(ren) will be cared for if they develop COVID-19; restricting some from feeling able to go to work.

Digital divide

- Risk of families unable to engage digitally falling off the radar, and may prove challenging to re-engage.
- For those who are able to access services digitally, there were reported safeguarding concerns due to not being able to see the complete family dynamic.

Impact of Social distancing / lockdown on new parents

- New parents are missing out on opportunities to attend parent groups to develop their parenting skills, and develop support networks with other new parents
- Parents / Carers unable to get respite from parenting / caring responsibilities, negatively impacting on their mental and emotional health and wellbeing, and potentially that of the children/people they are caring for.

Community Conversations

Parents and guardians / Carers (including unpaid carers) / Families on low and uncertain incomes

3. Parents, guardians and carers

- Improved local communication of government guidelines, and how they apply to the VCS sector, particularly in relation to what constitutes 'charitable activities' - An FAQ document was suggested, in plain English to allow for easy translation
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- Increased support needs to be provided to new parents, e.g. online, and support provided to link new parents up with each other to enable support networks to form
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- Urgently need mental health and respite support for parents struggling to cope. Whilst not necessarily reported locally, there have been national reports of an increase in incidents of harm towards babies and young children
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- Exemptions to social contact needs to include social workers making in-person visits to undertake assessments - online assessments are not able to provide full picture. However, this needs to be supported with adequate PPE.

Community Conversations

4. Cultural impact

Ethnically diverse communities / Faith based communities / Refugee and Migrant communities

Increased risk for Black and Asian communities

- Increased levels of anxiety amongst people from Black and Asian communities
- Higher proportion of people from these communities living in overcrowded housing and occupying key worker roles, placing them at increased risk of infection

Cultural nuances

- Jewish community noted specific challenges with isolation and mental wellbeing as social connection is fundamental to community life

Language / Communication barriers

- Communities where English is not the first language experiencing challenges with accessing up-to-date information, needing to rely on family to translate; increasing risk of unintentional non-adherence to guidelines, specifically African communities
- As orgs have transitioned online, very few have translated information; placing pressure on stretched ethnically diverse-led VCS orgs unable to signpost - with ED orgs also noting fewer requests from public sector for translation services, seen as a missed opportunity
- Orthodox Jewish community being provided insufficient information on latest guidelines, as technology actively discouraged within community

Reservations around vaccinations, risk of low uptake

- Some religious / faith-based communities citing reservations about wide-spread uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine, due to religious beliefs around vaccinations

- Improved translation of latest guidelines, to support communities for whom English is not their first language, with greater use of community organisations to undertake translation; ensuring more translated materials are on and offline
- Consideration of language translators with remote service delivery for appointments e.g. health, benefits etc.
- Improved communication between ethnically diverse community led orgs and statutory providers to improve their understanding of the needs of specific communities, to better inform how services can be appropriately adapted
- Good communication and connection between all organisations - to keep informed, share learning and identify opportunities (funding, ways to adapt services, connecting with isolated populations)
- Capacity building support to ethnically diverse led organisations; with bespoke support to address individual needs to support better resilience and future recovery
- Funding needs to be unrestricted, less bureaucratic and shorter timeframe from application to issuing grants. Core funding is essential at this time. e.g. Children in Need and Lloyds Foundation Trust noted as good examples
- Local policy and decision makers need to work with the Jewish community to find ways to ensure guidance is supported and adhered to and understand how it can be applied within their culture
- Preparations need to commence regarding a local information campaign regarding the forthcoming vaccine, with community leader input /

Community Conversations

5. People under the radar

LGBTQ community / Families on low and uncertain incomes / People experiencing homelessness / Victims of domestic abuse / Undocumented migrants

People at risk of harm (behind closed doors)

- People living in hostile and/or dangerous environments with limited access points to seek help or access support due to restricted movement and lack of access to services either in person or online

Fewer people asking for help

- Some providers reported that during the first lockdown, fewer people came forward to ask for financial support - thought to be due to lack of access, rather than a decrease in demand e.g. digitally excluded, with face-to-face avenues not available to them

No recourse to public funding

- Refugee and migrant communities unable to access vital funding due to fears about coming forward and asking for support. Need clear messaging, through appropriate and trusted channels to community support available, and access routes through trusted sources.

Insufficient data was able to be collected on these groups to gain a full picture. It is recommended that continued efforts are made to better understand the needs of these communities/groups, and identify solutions which ensure they are included within support pathways.

What is Hackney CVS doing?

- Working with VCH and Public Health to roll out **test and trace to local communities** - grant programme
- **CCG VCS Coronavirus Response Fund** - launched in August for 12 month projects
- Roll out of **neighbourhood conversations**
- **VCSE Operating Model** and **VCSE Enabler** workstream as part of ICS
- **Training and development** to support resilience in sector, reopening and fundraising support
- Ensure **safeguarding** and **risk assessments** are undertaken
- Refocussing some of our projects e.g. **Cool Down Cafe, Account Group**

Next Steps

- 1. A sector wide virtual event will be held on Wednesday 20 January 2021, inviting VCS and public sector stakeholders to review the findings, suggested solutions, with a view to developing a series of actions to mobilise a response.**
- 2. A timetable of future events will be agreed, at which progress will be reviewed, lessons learned shared, as well as the identification of any new needs which require additional solutions.**