

Rapid Needs Assessment into the Impact of the Changes of Delivery of Voluntary Sector Services due to Covid-19.

York JSNA Group, July 2020

Executive Summary

In July 2020 we spoke to voluntary sector organisations in York who have an information, advice, or guidance, role linked to health and/or wellbeing.

The voluntary sector has radically shifted to remote delivery of support in an effort to control the spread of covid-19. All organisations we spoke to have been able to make this shift to remote delivery of support, but some reported logistical challenges.

Although the voluntary sector is less equipped with data to demonstrate the changes, this rapid review has identified evidence that this shift is contributing to widening inequalities in access for vulnerable groups. In particular, older adults, people with learning disabilities, and people with more complex mental health conditions.

This insight correlates with wider evidence that a digital by default approach can increase inequalities in access to support for vulnerable groups. In this case, these inequalities have been exacerbated by the unusual circumstances that all of the usual support structures that people access across the voluntary and statutory sector have shifted their delivery approach simultaneously.

There is some evidence of an increase in demand for mental health support and financial advice from people who have not previously needed these support services. Both of these local insights correlate with wider evidence of increased and changing demand through covid-19

Positively, there is some evidence that online and email support is more accessible for some people who would not have previously sought support. We have been told that some organisations are intending to maintain an online support presence.

Overall this review indicates that voluntary sector support services in York have seen a rapid and significant shift in how they operate as a result of the covid-19 control measures. The interdependencies between these organisations and the wider health and social care sector are complex and substantial. As a result, voluntary sector organisations should be considered fully in the city recovery planning.

This rapid needs assessment should be read alongside the York CVS report into the impact of covid-19. This report found that, like other organisations, cash flow and reduced income were major challenges. Many organisations are drawing on limited financial reserves. The CVS Report makes recommendations for how partners can practically support third sector organisations through recovery phase.

Introduction

This rapid needs assessment by the York JSNA group details the changes to the delivery of voluntary sector support due to covid-19.

Many organisations have needed to work very differently in order to prevent the spread of the virus. This may have changed how people access their services so we want to understand if these changes have created any unexpected benefits, or any harms. We especially want to understand where these changes are believed to have widened inequalities which will help us identify priorities for the city through recovery.

In July 2020 we contacted several voluntary sector organisations in York and asked about the impact of their covid-19 response.

Full findings

- Charities that previously mainly worked with people face-to-face reported the greatest changes. The main change organisations told us about was the move from face to face contact to either online 1:1 coaching or mentoring sessions, and telephone support services. This was seen in every organisation.
 - A large recent York CVS report found that 76% of voluntary sector organisations had modified their service delivery, and 12% had not been able to maintain their service at all.
- Every organisation we spoke to was still having direct (usually phone) contact with the vulnerable groups of people they support. However it was not clear if every vulnerable individual they previously supported was still in contact with the services.
- There was a clear message that some people did not feel able to access online and telephone services, and have indicated they will only return to work with services when they resume face to face. This tended to be older people who do not have access to digital communication and also people with a learning disability who do not often use technology.
 - A large recent CVS Report found that among organisations who said digital exclusion was an issue for people they work with; 82% mentioned older people, 12% mentioned homeless people, 12% mentioned people with a physical impairment, and 12% mentioned people with a learning disability.
- Additionally, we were told that people who were particularly unwell with a mental health condition are less likely to engage online than people who experienced more mild symptoms.

- We also asked whether groups thought that clients would be able to resolve their known issues by other means. We were told that it very unlikely for some groups; in particular people with mental ill health conditions who were not in a crisis.
- Some organisations has been making proactive contact to particularly vulnerable clients that they had not spoken to. We were told that many of these clients were not able to access support before they had the call.
- Some organisations referenced that individuals were finding it difficult to get support because all organisations across the statutory and voluntary sector were changing how they operated at the same time.
- We were also told that some individuals who normally use voluntary sector support have been increasingly reliable on the GP helpline for non-medical concerns.
- Most of the voluntary organisations we approached prioritise on the delivery of support, and as a result do not collect detailed data sets. Overall, voluntary sector organisations do not collect detailed demographic information about the people who access their services, and are therefore not able to document the shift in the types of groups of people who accessed support. However, the organisations that do this have seen a shift in the types of people they are reaching.
- Mental health charities have reported a significant increase of people accessing the service during the months of the covid-19 'lockdown'. This aligns to national research which indicates an increase in people experiencing symptoms of mental ill health.
- Some of the organisations have seen an increase in their clients needing to access information about care assessments and housing. Some of the organisations have also seen more need for crisis work.
- Similarly some organisations have seen an increase in new clients requesting support with income support claims and employment issues.
- Logistically, some organisations have found it more complicated to share personal information safely due to limited access to the usual secure data transfer methods.
- On a positive note one mental health group has seen an increase in people using their services who have told them they would never have come into the building. The organisation is intended to continue with a mixed offer even when all social distancing measures are lifted.