Response ID ANON-N1EE-UFVZ-M

Submitted to **Research to understand the impact of Covid-19 on Communities - Organisational perspectives**
Submitted on **2020-05-27 14:45:10**

Questions

1 Please tell us about your organisation's aim(s), geographical focus, client groups and community activities since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic (i.e. from mid-March)?

Please share your views:
SCDC is the lead body for community development in Scotland. We work to our vision of an active, inclusive and just Scotland where our communities are strong, equitable and sustainable.

We work across the whole of Scotland with:
• Community groups and organisations
• Community development practitioners
• Government and other policy makers
• Local partnerships and agencies across Scotland who want to involve communities in their work.

Since mid-March, Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) has been working closely with the Scottish Government, funders and NHS nationally in offering assistance to community organisations and local partnerships to make what contributions they can to the COVID-19 crisis.

A priority area of work has been supporting the targeting of funds (such as the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities fund and Foundation Scotland's Community Response, Recovery & Resilience (RRR) Fund) to appropriate community networks and groups, particularly those working in and with our most disadvantaged communities. We were commissioned by Foundation Scotland to evaluate the initial funding distributed by the RRR fund.
https://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/news/rapid-evaluation-of-rrr-fund/

Working in partnership with Public Health Scotland, SCDC has developed comprehensive advice for community groups and volunteer networks on supporting people safely, helping to develop the best scientific advice for communities on how to make sure they don't accidentally spread the virus when delivering food, medicines etc. https://www.scdc.org.uk/supporting-communities-safely

Alongside this, we surveyed our own network about Covid-19's impact on community groups and communities which has helped shape our digital support for community groups as well as the resources and good practice we are sharing on our websites.
https://www.scdc.org.uk/news/article/2020/3/23/what-community-organisations-are-telling-us-about-their-covid-19-responses
https://www.scdc.org.uk/news/article/2020/3/19/advice-for-community-organisations-to-work-digitally

More widely, we are working in partnership with a range of other organisations to ensure community networks and more formal emergency responses are connected to better coordinate support and work practically together.

2 What information do you collect/hold/use to assess and monitor the general wellbeing of the people and communities you work with?

Please share your views:
In mid-late March, soon after social distance measures came into force in Scotland, we surveyed our network of community organisations and others working in community development to assess how communities and community organisations were experiencing the coronavirus outbreak and the resulting lockdown, and what support organisations required to provide emergency measure and sustain themselves during the crisis. 93 organisations responded, that has been useful in informing our activities since. Key findings are available on our website
https://www.scdc.org.uk/news/article/2020/3/23/what-community-organisations-are-telling-us-about-their-covid-19-responses

Our evaluation of Foundation Scotland's RRR fund heard from 135 community and voluntary organisations who received funding. The survey covered the impact on communities, the response to this and the longer-term impact on individuals, households and communities. Respondents were also asked to detail the medium to longer term challenges for their organisations.
https://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/news/rapid-evaluation-of-rrr-fund/

More generally, SCDC has extensive contact lists to a range of organisations and practitioners working in community development and related areas. Our CHEX community-led health database contains details of over 150 community-led health organisations working across Scotland. This was used to help the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities fund to direct support where it was needed. https://www.chex.org.uk/network

2a How is this information aggregated? Does it include breakdowns by location, age, gender, and any other characteristics?

Please share your views:
Our information on community organisations is broken down into location (including postcode and local authority area). Our CHEX database is also aggregated by theme, with categories including anti-poverty, BME, carers, disability, food, housing and homelessness, long-term conditions, older people, urban/rural and young people.

We do not collect information on individuals apart from contact information and accessibility requirements for one-off purposes such as events.

3 Thinking about the people and communities you work with, which of the following, if any, has the coronavirus pandemic (including the restrictions and support arrangements put in place) impacted NEGATIVELY? Please select all that apply.

Finances (including income, outgoings, financial security), Personal safety and security, Social relationships and connections, Physical and mental health, Neighbourhood support, Access to services, Public services, Ability to cope generally, Other (please detail below)

If other, please provide details:
Food and fuel poverty
Domestic abuse

If you have any specific examples or comments regarding negative impacts, please share them here:
Community organisations that have taken part in our research have told us that, while more and more people are experiencing financial hardship and mental health issues, it is those groups already experiencing poverty and poor mental health that are being hit the hardest. Organisations working in bottom SIMD areas have described how vulnerable communities will face a long recovery. Communities of interest and identity are also at increased risk, and our surveys have picked up on a growing level of mental health need from, for example, people with long-term health conditions, young people and refugees and asylum seekers.

The response to the crisis from local community projects has been well-documented and clearly illustrates that pre-existing grassroots organisation is a key element of community resilience. However, this resilience is now being put under strain, with community organisations facing immediate and long-term funding challenges. The rapid funding response from the Scottish Government and other funders has been welcome, but sustainability will be an ongoing concern, with organisations struggling to fundraise, carry out key-funded activity and meet increased demand. The impact of this on wider communities is already being felt, with organisations finding it harder to provide core services to those most in need.

3a Thinking about the people and communities you work with, which of the following, if any, has the coronavirus pandemic (including the restrictions and support arrangements put in place) impacted POSITIVELY? Please select all that apply.

Social relationships and connections, Neighbourhood support

If other, please provide details:

If you have any specific examples or comments regarding positive impacts, please share them here:
The response from across society to the Covid-19 pandemic has been extraordinary, with people in communities coming together and supporting each other in ways that might not have been imagined before the crisis. Community organisations have been a huge part of that. Shaped by local knowledge and experience, and in many instances bolstered by a new influx of volunteers, community organisations have kept many members of the population safe and supported. Had they not been there, many people would have experienced adverse outcomes and demand on public services would be higher – immediately and further down the line.

The surge in volunteering that organisations have described relates to the wider notion of 'community spirit'. Respondents to our own research have reported that the Covid-19 crisis has brought out the best in their communities, with people looking out for and supporting one another. Some organisations also report increased profile of their work and the Scotland-wide community response to Covid-19 may result in an enhanced reputation and increased role for the voluntary and community sector in addressing disadvantage.

At the same time as organisations want to build on these positives, there is a concern that both the sector and the expansion in 'community spirit' cannot be taken for granted. Social distancing has reduced social connectivity, something that could damage community-led activity in the longer term. If the community sector is to continue playing a key role during recovery it will need to be adequately supported by the statutory sector and independent funders in order to fulfil this role. There is also the overhanging question of 'responsibilisation'. Important public services need to be paid for by a fair and redistributive tax system. Expecting communities to take on too much will lead to growing inequality.

4 Have you developed any new ways of working (including new links with other organisations) to enable to you to understand, and respond to, the issues facing the people and communities you work with? If so, please provide brief details.

Please share your views:
The community sector has proved itself to be flexible, responsive and innovative in its response to Covid-19.

Many organisations have changed or expanded their services to respond to the Covid-19 emergency. In most cases this has involved changing how their services are delivered from face-to-face to online or remote. In many cases they have also had to expand their service due to an increase in people requiring support, including those referred by other services.

Overall, the pandemic has presented opportunities as well as challenges for community organisations to adapt to new ways of working, including delivering services in a way that maintains social distance. Responses include changing the layout of rooms and extending opening hours so that activities can take place in a socially distant manner.
It is early days, but there we are hearing of examples of good partnership work between different community organisations as well as between community organisations and other local organisations. This includes making joint funding responses and action plans, sharing vital equipment and sharing information to identify ways of responding effectively.

Some examples of community organisations developing new ways of working, often in partnership with others, can be found on our Communities Channel Scotland website. http://www.communityscot.org.uk/news/article/communities-responding-covid-19/

SCDC's own work has moved online and we have been able to continue, or start to pick up, many elements of our partnership work as well as our learning from communities. It has taken longer for our support to community organisations to move online. We are starting to do this, for example moving monthly retreats with people experiencing homelessness online (as part of the All in for Change programme to address homelessness, in partnership with Homeless Network Scotland, Cyrenians).

In many instances, existing links with other organisations have been strengthened while working to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on communities. For

instance, we have worked in partnership with the Scottish Government, funders and other third sector intermediary organisations to help with the distribution of funding and to learn from this. We have built on our strong relationship with Public Health Scotland to develop the infection control advice for community organisations.

5 Has your organisation started working with any new people or communities since the start of the coronavirus pandemic?

Yes

If yes, what has brought about this new engagement?:
We are answering this question from the perspective of most community organisations we have been in touch with during the pandemic. As mentioned above, community organisations are experiencing increased demand on their services from more people within their communities, including where public agencies refer people to them in the absence of other support.

A lot of this new engagement is direct support to those in self-isolation, including the provision of food and medicine as well as information and moral support. Many organisations have set up new emergency provision while others have expanded their existing services (e.g. foodbanks and meals on wheels services).

In addition, community organisations have described how job-losses and financial hardship are affecting many more people in the community than before. This has had knock on effects in terms of levels of food and fuel poverty, mental health issues, and other issues such as domestic violence, fuelling demand on services.

If yes, do you see this work continuing long-term, or is this a temporary shift for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic?:
Our evaluation of Foundation Scotland's RRR fund directly addressed this question. Many community organisations who responded were clear about the medium to long-term nature of the impact of Coronavirus on communities and the resulting increase in engagement/support.

6 What does your organisation understand as the short, medium and long term priorities of the people and communities you work with in responding to, and recovering from, the coronavirus pandemic?

Please share your views:
In the short term, the immediate priority which community organisations have told us they are addressing is that of ensuring people are safe, healthy and have enough food and other supplies. It is important to bear in mind that the detail of priorities may vary across society. For instance, community organisations supporting people with health conditions have told us that their members do not have access to vital services during lockdown and are therefore experiencing a worsening of their conditions.

In the medium to longer term, the clear picture that is emerging from organisations working at the front line is that the impact of coronavirus will be felt for some time. This includes financial hardship caused by a likely economic downturn, mental health challenges, over-reliance on the current emergency provision, the impact on people's confidence to take part in activities once lockdown is lifted and increases in digital inequality.

A priority for the community sector is sustained funding along the lines of the recent emergency funding response where community organisations are trusted to deliver on the ground and to design their own responses appropriate to the communities they work with. Clearly, longer-term funding is an important part of this. This will ensure that the amazing work supporting communities continues beyond the immediate crisis.

But from our wider learning, we know that not all communities are as resilient as the best examples we are now hearing about. Therefore, a key priority is to support people in disadvantaged communities, and those with equality characteristics experiencing discrimination, to build community activity that can give them more control, resilience and influence over their lives.

Of these, what seem like the most fundamental issues for the long term?:
We believe there is an emerging consensus that we cannot accept shortened lives and adverse health outcomes for anyone, whether as a result of coronavirus or any other cause. Health inequalities are defined as the unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society. Health inequalities arise because of the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. We need to invest in similar responses to health inequalities, as well as environmental injustice, including support for community-led activity on the ground and for those who are most affected to have a voice in the dialogue to reshape our society.

7 Are there any new opportunities that this situation has created that you see as valuable for the recovery period and your longer term practice (e.g. new relationships/partnerships, communication flows, technology, etc.)?

Please share your views:
There are many opportunities arising from the increased working together and new ways of doing things. But the main opportunity is a chance to take stock as a country and assess what our priorities are in terms of wellbeing and the economy. In its recent framework for recovery, the Scottish Government says it wants to "go beyond rebuilding, and look to the social and economic reforms necessary to achieve the best future for Scotland." To ensure this, a process of deliberative participation should be put in place, building on recent democratic innovations and developments in Scotland such as the Citizen's Assembly of Scotland, participatory budgeting and the Democracy Matters conversation.

Critically, those at the sharp end of inequality and the community organisations that represent them need to be at the centre of this conversation, for two key reasons. Firstly, there is a danger that unequal power relations and our unsustainable economy will be re-created if the people who are most disadvantaged have no voice. And secondly, people need to be on board with the difficult but necessary economic and social changes from the start.

8 Is there anything else you would like to share with us, including any comments on the content/structure of the questions?

Please share your views:

About you

What is your name?

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What is your organisation?

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to name your organisation as a contributor to this research.Please note, we will not attribute any response to your organisation or publish any response in full. Please indicate your preference:

Please name organisation as contributor

Are you content for the Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this research?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent