



London Community Response

How civil society delivered differently, and how funders need to support groups in the future



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WHAT IS THE LONDON COMMUNITY RESPONSE?

The London Community Response (LCR) is a collaboration of 67 funders, powered by London Funders – the membership organisation for funders of London’s civil society. Responding to the covid-19 crisis, funders involved in the LCR have been working together to provide coordinated funding to support groups responding to the needs of the capital’s communities

The single application point for charities and community groups has enabled organisations to access funding from multiple funders in a fast and efficient way. It has been designed based on insights from groups working with Londoners, to ensure that it is flexible and responds to needs as they emerge over time.

One year on from its inception, over £57.5m has been given out in grants through the LCR – with investment moving from crisis response in the early days of the pandemic, to building towards the recovery and renewal of civil society.

Working together, funders recognised that the social, economic and health consequences of covid-19 have disproportionately impacted those already-marginalised in society. The LCR funding programmes have prioritised supporting groups led by and for Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, LGBT+ communities, Deaf and Disabled people and/or women.

Learning Partners

To support the process of learning, unlearning and thinking for the future, London Funders appointed two Learning Partners – Reos Partners and the Social Investment Consultancy – to work independently, but alongside, the LCR partnership. Working together, both organisations have focused on the experiences of working across sectors, and have sought to capture how best London Funders and the wider LCR collaboration can influence the funding sector to maintain new and better ways of working in the ‘new normal’.

We had four questions to answer together:

1. How can we build on the experience of the LCR to enable future collaboration?
2. How can the experiences of civil society groups inform future ways of working?
3. How can we continue to strengthen our approach to equity and inclusion?
4. What should the key areas of focus be as we look towards renewal?

This report answers question two and was written by a team from Reos Partners.

ABOUT THIS REPORT



The UK confirmed its first case of covid-19 on the 31 of January, 2020 – the subsequent period has been one of unprecedented disruption. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have gravely impacted all aspects of people’s lives in London – from employment to education, from food to family breakdown, from advice to the arts, from money to mental health – whilst people navigated loss, distress and uncertainty.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been working hard to support communities to survive this crisis whilst experiencing significant challenges themselves – many lost access to some of their sources of funding, or were juggling service delivery alongside rapid policy change and new schemes such as furlough. The demands of lockdown required CSOs to assess the best ways to deliver their services to their beneficiaries, and to act quickly – adapting to the rapidly-changing situation, moving away from face-to-face or other traditional

methods of reaching people, and dealing with new or increased demands. The following report provides examples of how CSOs met these challenging circumstances and delivered their services differently.

The purpose of the report is to inspire the uptake of useful ideas by others working in this sector. While these adaptations emerged in the context of the global pandemic, some can deliver positive results, even in less constrained and challenging conditions. Each section provides a summary of the ways that CSOs delivered differently. The examples were provided by 582 CSOs who responded to a survey of organisations receiving funding through the London Community Response, and by an analysis of applications to the London Community Response where applications were asked about the impact of Covid on their organisation, and what they wanted to do to ‘Deliver Differently’.

USING TECHNOLOGY IN NEW WAYS

“We are developing a digital platform that will enable local sports clubs to generate revenue which was lost due to fans not being able to attend games and purchase tickets.”

Moving services online

Lockdown and subsequent physical distancing guidelines required many organisations to rapidly adapt by moving their services online, in many cases this resulted in CSOs reaching a larger number of beneficiaries, and empowering them with easily accessible online resources and educational tools.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“We transitioned all our training to online delivery which has meant that we have started to work with partners all around the UK, where previously our training was delivered in person and was mainly in London. We plan to continue this model to an extent even when restrictions are lifted.”

“We began to deliver Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in a virtual space. We use a child-safe VPN to help ensure our systems are secure for all users. We were unsure about it but young people have embraced it. Digital poverty has surprisingly not been an issue for these clients but has been for other groups.”

“We developed an online learning zone with lesson plans for teachers/youth workers to educate young people about knife crime and gangs. We include videos featuring real people with real lived experience of knife crime and gangs on our website.”

*“When we cancelled all our in-school theatre work in March, we set about creating a six-week home learning resource based around Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. We did this both for the mainstream primary schools with which we work, and the special needs schools that are part of our network. This was so successful (it was used by teachers and parents in 83 different countries around the world) with overwhelmingly positive responses, that we have now set up a new digital department to create more such resources. The next one (*Romeo and Juliet*) is coming soon.”*

“We have produced a good practice guide for carrying out restorative justice online. We also shared a report we produced which evaluates



different online conferencing platforms and measures to put in place when supporting victims online. Alongside this, we organised an online restorative listening forum for people who had experienced hate crime by the criminal justice system. We are looking at how the structure of the forum can be used in many different contexts to understand how people may have been affected by not only crime, but other forms of harm.”

“We are developing a digital platform that will enable local sports clubs to generate revenue which was lost due to fans not being able to attend games and purchase tickets. We will offer a live streaming service that will enable them to still earn income through their fans.”

“Throughout lockdown, we teamed up with a specialist organisation to run online workshops with the people

we support. In these workshops, people have been talking about the changes they would like to see made to the Social Security and Housing systems after lockdown, so that they adequately support everyone to live stable and dignified lives. The people involved really enjoyed being able to talk about their experiences, whilst being connected with like-minded individuals during a time of isolation. Bringing clients together really showed how important it is to not only include lived experience in everything a charity does but to also combat mental health issues and loneliness.”

Technology-based services for Deaf and Disabled People

CSOs specialising in serving Deaf and Disabled communities developed innovative technology-based services to support beneficiaries, enabling them to communicate with healthcare workers and keeping people informed by making information accessible.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“We have continued to adapt and innovate to meet the needs of the Deaf Community during this pandemic. 89% of Deaf people we surveyed were worried about being able to communicate with medical staff if hospitalised with covid-19. To address this need, we launched BSLHealthAccess, providing a video relay interpreting service, free and universally available, 24 hours a day, for communication with Deaf people in health settings. This new service, which we are funding from our reserves, has proved indispensable for Deaf people during this pandemic.”

“We provided tablets and tech to people with a learning disability, autism, or both. We are working on the continuation of providing accessible information and ways of communicating for our beneficiaries.”

COMMUNICATING THROUGH NEW CHANNELS

Recognising that without buildings or physical assets (e.g. posters and leaflets), it would be harder to reach beneficiaries through traditional means, CSOs used new channels for communication, including television, podcasts, webcasts, and social media outlets.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“We are a network for some of the most pro-active Special Educational Needs organisations in Brent who come together to provide support and share best practice. We created a series of podcasts to reach out to, engage with, and to support our SEN community in Brent and beyond.”

“We appeared on BBC Somali service, who did a mini documentary on our community food drop. This was very well received within the Somali community in London. We also put a video of this on our dedicated Youtube channel.”

“We developed online webcasts with highly influential individuals/ celebrities who actively support our work. We had conversations with them about their careers, life, etc. This was a win-win scenario for the cause, the influencer and the watching audience.”

“Working remotely and engaging with users has brought challenges, but also a way of working that proved

successful with our beneficiaries. WhatsApp groups seem to work to get momentum going, whilst zoom group meetings led to specific action points. It brought beneficiaries together and to think of collective solutions.”

“We found that delivering events on Instagram can work very well in reaching a wide audience, and that Zoom can be used effectively to deliver workshops and mental health support.”

“We introduced a ‘Check in and Chat’ phone service for volunteers to call food parcel recipients who are feeling isolated for a chat. The response has been really positive and we now want to extend the service long term.”

“We asked our beneficiaries to supply two minute video diaries to explain their week. It really helped us build a picture of need and also what things were working, or what was not so urgent, or things that were improving their state of mind.”

“Working remotely and engaging with users has brought challenges, but also a way of working that proved successful with our beneficiaries.”



USING PHYSICAL SPACE IN NEW WAYS



Distributed service provision

The logistics of access to essential resources – such as food – was a key challenge at the beginning of the pandemic and through the subsequent lockdowns. CSOs came up with innovative solutions turning these challenges to opportunities by collaborating with other service providers and businesses as delivery partners, and in other instances implemented trust based, and non-stigmatised approaches.

Besides meeting basic needs, CSOs recognised the challenges that come with families spending more time at home. To assist families in coping with the stress and challenges that come with an extended lockdown, CSOs distributed activity packs with all the essential materials to their beneficiaries' homes.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“At the beginning of the pandemic there were no door to door deliveries of essential food and other supplies to people’s homes. We partnered with the beat police who were able to deliver food to individuals. This also improved the police relationships with local young people. Following this we were able to get the church to take over deliveries, as they had a van. The ongoing improved relationship between young people and the police can continue now and beyond the pandemic period.”

“The logistics of delivering food was a key cause for concern during this crisis period. Before lockdown we had no model for delivering breakfast, it was solely accessible on-site at schools. With the support of a corporate partner we were able to deliver take-home breakfast packs to

schools or alternative delivery sites during lockdown. School staff have then been organising for these packs to be collected by families or arranging deliveries to families’ doors. To help us reach more children at risk of hunger during this period, our partner also stepped in to help with its warehousing and logistics expertise. A team from its fulfilment centre has been packing up the parcels of breakfast food before they were shipped through their logistics arm to the homes of children across the UK. Over the summer term we delivered breakfast provision to around 10,000 students. This number rose to 20,000 during the summer holidays. This continues to be useful as we face local lockdowns and must continue to reach children who are unable to come into school. Beyond the pandemic, we are looking at this as a solution to tackling holiday hunger, to provide children breakfast during half term and over the summer holidays.”

“Our small food parcel service has grown from 10-20 parcels per week before lockdown to 150-200 per week, a database of over 500 households and 50+ volunteers delivering food, shopping and medicines. Our advice service has more than doubled with the church providing laptops for: jobsearch, IT access, court and tribunal hearings. We also developed a telephone bank keeping in touch with older members, vulnerable families and those who attended projects in the hall. Circulation of the weekly newsletter has also more than doubled.”

“We provided supermarket food vouchers to those who would not engage with foodbanks due to lack of cultural foods and pride.”

“One of the problems faced by the groups that use our services was that due to covid restrictions, the venues where groups usually met were closed and groups were no longer able to meet. To make it easier for people to access products, we opened up a Take What You Need (TWYN) trust-based

scheme, where groups were able to go along to our storage unit (access codes were requested by email in advance) and take the donations that they needed. This trust-based scheme was a new initiative for us, but we wanted to make it as easy as possible for people to source products. We developed several ways for people to access the donations, but the TWYN was a new innovation which might also help other people to distribute their donations. It enabled groups to access the donations at a time convenient to them, and meant that we did not have to deliver to a venue or address, which during the initial stages of covid lockdown, many groups did not have.”

“We created craft packs for families and gave these to families in need. Children had to create a puppet theatre, we included expressions puppets – so children could discuss feelings around the pandemic/ lockdown. We also set up mental health support sessions for families with a trained counsellor.”

“We were able to send out weekly activity packs with instructions for all family members to take part in. The continuation of this would be good as covid continues, and even after the crisis period ends, as families have been excited to work together on their weekly projects, and the families we support find it very difficult to enjoy family time together due to the stress of having a child/children with a life-limiting illness. Having ideas sent to them with supplies has made their lives a little easier.”

“During lockdowns, in response to local needs, we increased our food growing to provide fresh produce weekly to the food bank. We designed the Stay at Home Garden activity packs and sent seed packs out. We communicate our guidelines clearly to all users and via email and have set up outdoor spaces where participants can sit two metres apart.”

“The function of the foodbank has been able to expand beyond the provision of food, for example assisting asylum seekers in getting help from local authorities and charities, providing furniture and other necessities for impoverished families.”

Using vacant property for alternative services

The pandemic resulted in property being vacated due to physical distancing guidelines. Service providers took this opportunity to set up foodbank services and homeless hubs in these locations.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“We are a faith organisation and so all normal activities (services, community meetings) have been largely suspended; the innovation for us was to use the opportunity to expand the foodbank service, using the temporarily empty faith buildings to store more food and run the foodbank with proper social distancing and protection in place. The function of the foodbank has been able to expand beyond the provision of food, for example assisting asylum seekers in getting help from local authorities and charities, providing furniture and other necessities for impoverished families.”

“We set up drop in hubs at the hotels in which homeless people were given emergency accommodation during the pandemic. The hubs are places where people (rough sleepers) can access advice and support around anything – health, employment, finances – as well as digital access, as most support

is now only available online. It has been particularly helpful in engaging young rough sleepers who were previously not working with us, and were hidden homeless before the pandemic. Young people were housed in the hotels, without conditionality, so are more willing to engage with us and find it easier to engage because they are accommodated, therefore in the same place each day and in a more stable environment. Some young people have seen very quick changes – from the streets, into accommodation, accessing training (such as construction safety certificates) then moved into work in a matter of weeks. By setting up the Hubs at the hotel, with skilled staff and resources, we have made the most of the opportunity to work with a group of individuals who we might not otherwise have ever come into contact with.”

COORDINATING IN NEW WAYS



Increased external and internal coordination

Some CSOs responded to the crisis by coordinating and collaborating with other organisations, local governments, businesses and service providers, both increasing their reach and their impact for the communities they serve.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“We held daily meetings with the local authority to remove barriers. This was very effective.”

“The crisis has brought a number of the key local charities together to work more closely and collaboratively, building better relationships and helping to increase coordination and cooperation and reduce duplication. I think this will continue going forward.”

“Within our immediate community we were able to join with other organisations to meet very specific needs. A joint focus, good communication and consistent review has meant that by pooling our resources we have been more effective in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. Using research to identify

needs, and working collaboratively with a joint focus to meet these needs is a good model at any time.”

“We found it quite encouraging that local community groups, businesses and members of the public came together to support vulnerable groups during the peak of the crisis. Established charities such as ours became a focal point for channeling the support to where it was most needed.”

“We have worked with other local organisations which has allowed us to provide additional support beyond homeless people. We were able to, for example, run the summer food and fun programme as collaboration for local children and impoverished families.”

“The governance of our organisation has been positively impacted by everyone embracing digital communication – we have been able to make a series of decisions in a much quicker time frame because meetings have been held online.”

“Emergency intelligence meetings were established at the beginning of the pandemic and have continued since, gathering and sharing intelligence as the pandemic unfolded, and feeding into strategic communications and advocacy with pan-London and national government. We plan to continue these and, although the pandemic will remain a priority for as long as necessary, they will have a wider policy and advocacy brief.”

“From the outset we recognised disabled people would be among those bearing the brunt of the pandemic. We responded by producing a special covid-19 supplement for the advice sector and setting up regular meetings

with local user-led Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs). Our helplines have provided us with daily feedback about what is happening on the ground; our advisers have then been analysing and interpreting, using their experience of helping disabled people navigate new systems, benefit rules, Care Act etc. Our policy team has been able to positively influence through our strong networks, strategic partnerships we coordinate and links into government.”

“Our team is needing to attend more risk meetings, co-ordinate and liaise more with agencies like police, social services and CAMHs to ensure risks are managed. This means we are supporting a reduced quantity of young people but providing more hours of intervention, case management and the number of direct hours with clients on the issues often peak at evenings or weekends.”



Delivering through volunteers

Many CSOs recruited more volunteers or even moved to a volunteer-led model to meet the increased demand for their services during the pandemic.

STORIES FROM CSOs

“Covid-19 afforded little time to migrate to online services using digital systems. The charity had outdated IT equipment and software, poor digital knowledge, insufficient home-office equipment, health and safety issues, no paid employees, limited finances and management support. This impacted our capacity to support the needs of our communities, and our capacity to engage communities was further impacted as a result of the digital divide for Black communities and organisations. Volunteer groups rapidly mobilised themselves to relieve the needs of vulnerable people, this meant we were able to focus on what we could do rather than could not do in the heat of the moment. As such, our emergency response focused on providing telephone befriending, food vouchers and signposting to humanitarian aid to ensure people were safe during the first and second wave.”

“A year on from the start of pandemic we are pleased with how well we have adapted to delivering services virtually and continued to support over 700 girls and young women online. We gave our beneficiaries more opportunities to tell us what their emerging needs were and we were able to respond quickly. For example girls wanted two sessions a week, not one because of their increased feelings of isolation. We were able to deliver this with more commitment from

our volunteers and additional hours from our staff. We have also been planning for the summer when girls will need extra support in readjusting to whatever the ‘new normal’ becomes. In order to support the girls in a safe and engaging way, we have created new materials and redesigned workshops and asked for feedback more frequently.”

“Due to the increase in demand for support from women, our outreach services have almost tripled in operation. We have increased our staff working hours to tackle this rise in demand and have acquired new volunteers thanks to a rise in interest and applications. We also provided service users with mobile phones to ensure they had a method of communication to seek help and support from us, and subsequently our electronic communications with the women have dramatically increased.”

“We adapted services quickly and retained 60% of our hardest to reach and most vulnerable clients via phone and online video. We built new partnerships for emergency support via council hubs and with local partners for essentials. Services take longer to deliver as our 1:1 service remains an intensive support model. We adapted our volunteer training course, delivered 250% more volunteer training alongside online teaching support and recruited 75 new volunteers to build the service

“Due to the increase in demand for support from women, our outreach services have almost tripled in operation”

back. Client demand increased by 38% and we will deliver a blended model retaining remote training and delivery services alongside place-based community support.”

“National media highlighted the tragic increase in domestic violence and drew the attention of the public to how often violence against women and girls happens in our homes by people we know. As a charity we learnt quickly how to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of covid-19. A six-week Virtual Train the Trainer Programme with young people from London, India and South Africa was held, giving the youth an opportunity to speak into our Primary Schools Programme curriculum and making small but significant additions through their youth lenses. Funding was received for our Youth Ambassador Programme, recruitment took place, with passionate young people trained via Zoom. The Lead Lambeth and Hounslow Youth Ambassadors are working alongside the Lead International Youth Ambassador and other young people from London, South Africa and India to design and then implement the programme in secondary schools.”

Through the research with CSOs, and through a workshop as part of the London Funders ‘Festival of Learning’ in May 2021, people reflected on what funders would need to do differently to support civil society to respond to the needs of people and communities.

It is important to recognise that these innovations and developments did not come from nowhere – they were delivered by CSOs with a strong track record of reach and trust within communities, and with skilled and committed people working and volunteering to make a difference to their work. One of the participants at the workshop reflected that “we’ve done more collaboration in six months than we did in six years, and we could do this because of the long-term investment in civil society infrastructure and relationships in our area” – to be there for a short-term crisis, CSOs needed to have long-term, thoughtful and flexible funding in place before and after their response to ensure it was effective. The role of funders in creating and nurturing these relationships and systems before the pandemic was critical and maintaining these ways of working should remain a priority as we exit the crisis phase.

Noting the advantages that came with a shift to digital delivery for some CSOs, people cautioned that this did not come without concerns from groups and from communities. Recalling discussions with funders before the pandemic, some groups were concerned that the increased numbers of people they worked with through the crisis would be used as a benchmark for future funding – whereas a mixed delivery model, which often

worked better for reaching and supporting people navigating personal or systems complexity, would inevitably mean less people being reached with a similar level of funding. Highlighting the importance of re-establishing appropriate face-to-face services post-lockdown, and of intensifying support to people affected by loneliness and isolation who may not have engaged with online services, recognition from funders of the complexity of the picture and a more nuanced approach to future funding decisions was encouraged.

When asked what funders could do to support CSOs as they continue to deliver differently and respond flexibly to changing needs, the key messages were: provide core funding; increase flexibility of funding; streamline and simplify processes, linked to a single application form; shifting focus to the long-term; investing in places and creating the conditions for change; and encouraging and enabling collaboration.

On core funding, it was noted that this learning had been incorporated into the design of wave five of the LCR – with a core grants programme available for organisations needing resources for recovery and renewal. Through this wave of funding just over £6.8m of grants were provided as core funding, and learning from these will be shared through



London Funders to help shape future conversations about how core funding can best be delivered to the sector.

On flexible funding, there was recognition from CSOs that the “We Stand With The Sector” statement signed by over 400 funders was a strong and helpful contribution in reframing the relationship between groups and funders. This statement was built on through the LCR with flexibility built in to funding agreements wherever possible, with positive feedback from funded groups about the excellent relationships that had been established between LCR funders and CSOs through the crisis period. Separately, Reos Partners have produced a report with lessons on process through the LCR which is available from London Funders, and builds on learning on how funder processes can be reshaped for

the future. In addition, London Funders has been supporting work with the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) on how funders can embed open and trusting practices in their work, with over 60 funders already signed up to commitments on working flexibly for the future.

Recognising the impact of a single application form as an entry point for the LCR, CSOs reflected on opportunities to continue this, and apply the learning to other aspects of process – for example a unified and simple reporting framework across funders, with single reporting points where organisations (and funders) could report on their contribution to change, and people could extract the information they needed on the impact of the funding or particular organisations or projects. London Funders will be looking

WHAT NEXT

at learning through the year of using a common framework for reporting on LCR grants to identify opportunities to build from this with funders to simplify and streamline other parts of the funding journey for CSOs.

CSOs had appreciated the urgent and clear support funders had given through the crisis, and were hopeful that as attention turned to the long-term future of funding funders would continue to take a considered approach to how investment could best bring about change – for example, not just dealing with the crisis needs of communities, but also seeking to tackle the underlying issues of poverty and rights for Londoners. Alongside this shift in focus to the long-term, the encouragement for funders to continue to think of long-term investment into people and places, funding the conditions and relationships needed for change, not just the project-style interventions that address immediate needs, was highlighted by CSOs. These themes are explored further in the sister report in this series looking at the question “what should the key areas of focus be as we look towards renewal?”.

Throughout the process of learning together over the last year the theme of collaboration has repeatedly been highlighted – from funders working together through the LCR, to CSOs working together on an issue or in a place to respond effectively to the rapidly-changing needs of communities, and all working collaboratively through the evolving situation so that energies and resources could be most effectively targeted. A key lesson for the future is the importance of fostering and enabling this spirit of collaboration between groups, between people, and between sectors – whether at a regional or local level – and will remain a key area of focus for London Funders as they look to the future beyond covid-19.

Continue the conversation and take action together

London Funders will be working with our members to look at how we can respond to the changing needs of our communities – if you're not already a member, you'll find information on how to get involved on our website at www.londonfunders.org.uk

“We've done more collaboration in six months than we did in six years, and we could do this because of the long-term investment in civil society infrastructure and relationships in our area.”



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