

Children's Neighbourhood Scotland – Early insights into the COVID-19 response

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[Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) (CNS) is based in the University of Glasgow, working in partnership with the [Glasgow Centre for Population Health](#). In collaboration with [Policy Scotland](#) and the [Network for Social and Educational Equity](#), CNS is undertaking a [programme of research and intelligence gathering](#) in high poverty settings across Scotland that seeks to understand how local responses are working in the current rapidly changing context and provide insights that can support the next phase of COVID-19 action at both local and national levels. This document is the [part of a series](#) that shares regular insights emerging from the research.

The third sector - a collaborative response to supporting families

- The third sector have played a crucial role in responding to the Covid-19 crisis, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Within hours of the government announcement, many third sector organisations had already adapted their activities to meet the urgent needs of families, for example shifting from teaching people to cycle to food shopping and collecting prescriptions. Funders have been supportive of the fast, agile response from the third sector, allowing organisations to re-purpose their existing grants and relaxing eligibility criteria for new funding applications.
- The ways in which third sector organisations have worked together to respond to the needs of families during the crisis has been impressive. The Glasgow Helps helpline was set up within four days. It was initiated by GCVS and involves GCC, HSCP, Volunteer Glasgow and Scottish Fire and Rescue. Partners contribute staff time to run the helpline. Requests for help are routed to the appropriate organisations using the GCVS directory of over 300 organisations across Glasgow. The helpline and directory have been used to identify and plug gaps in local provision. Where there is an absence of food provision in an area, third sector organisations have responded to requests and expanded their reach. The helpline also processes offers of help from volunteers. The private sector has contributed to this effort with donations of food, PPE equipment and offers of transport.
- *“COVID has forced organisations to come together in a way I’ve not seen before” (front-line worker).* In one neighbourhood, with a strong support structure for local collaboration, larger organisations with greater capacity to submit funding applications at short notice shared out funds between partners to ensure that smaller organisations were supported. This is a significant step against a background of local organisations competing against each other for funding.
- Additional funding for the COVID-19 response has also created tensions and coordination challenges, especially where relationships between organisations were already difficult and support structures were not in place.
- Third sector organisations are attempting to respond to the need for emotional support, while recognising the limits of their professional expertise and the long waiting list for NHS mental health services. The pressure of supporting emotional needs is exacerbated by remote working *“You’re dealing with high levels of trauma and you can’t just speak to your colleagues afterwards or leave it behind when you finish work. Your office is your home” (front-line worker).*

Planning for the future

- Some third sector organisations are considering the future exit strategy, so that “we don’t create dependency in the community”, one example given described setting up a participatory project for community food provision involving local people, with volunteering opportunities.
- In planning for recovery, it is important that third sector organisations are adequately funded. Core funding for staff would reduce the negative impact that applying for grants to fund salaries has on workloads and staff mental health and allow organisations to focus on meeting the needs of children and families.
- Funders could consider streamlining funding application and approval processes and allowing continuation of grants for the COVID-19 response, rather than seeking new proposals and innovations for each funding round.
- Many third sector organisations are concerned that there is currently no capacity to support the predicted significant growth in demand for services to support mental health. There is a need to plan for an increase in cases of child abuse and domestic abuse as lockdown restrictions are lifted.
- Communication between the local authorities and individual third sector organisations has been productive. There is a need to involve the wider sector in strategic planning. Overall there is a sense that the usual channels of communication “dried up” in the first phase of the crisis and re-establishing existing and new channels of communication is a priority moving forward. Community Planning could play an important role here if its strategic partnership functions are restored.
- In considering models for learning in schools and the associated challenges and opportunities it would seem remiss not to include the third sector in discussions. Many organisations have been providing support, particularly for vulnerable children and young people, and have tailored their offers and ways of working accordingly, in the same way that schools have. Drawing on these cross-sector perspectives and experience could support the development of blended models of learning where both face to face and virtual delivery will be required. This is particularly the case where young people are at risk of not re-engaging with school.

Key questions for consideration

- To what extent are third sector perspectives, learning and intelligence being systematically built into the next phase of the COVID-19 response planning?
- How might the voices of children and young people be part of the discussion – for example, in considering how social distancing will work in schools and youth organisations?

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