

GMCVO

Knowledge

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cuts

Findings from a GMCVO survey on the impact of spending cuts on communities across Greater Manchester



Greater Manchester Centre
for Voluntary Organisation

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1. Introduction

When GMCVO conducted a survey to gather evidence about the impact of the spending cuts on communities in Greater Manchester we suspected that the issue of cuts would generate a healthy degree of interest. Nevertheless, we were quite overwhelmed by the response to the survey, which was designed to utilise third sector organisations' experience of working with communities on the ground. With 336 respondents starting the survey and 249 completing it, the response rate was significant for a qualitative survey. The wealth of information respondents shared with us made analysis a real challenge, but it also showed that the recession and the subsequent spending cuts have virtually left no one untouched and that, understandably, passions are running high on the subject.

Delving into this information was a humbling experience, because it showed how many organisations are struggling to do their best to cope with the sheer volume of people in need in order to close the gaps that have been left behind in the wake of the first wave of cuts. And yet there was a sense that the worst was yet to come and the full extent of the impact would only materialise over time. Our respondents' service users were confronted with a raft of difficult problems that result from poverty, such as homelessness, debt, domestic violence, mental health issues, and social isolation. The root causes tend to be unemployment or underemployment, changes in the benefits system and a rising cost of living, and these root causes, paired with a withdrawal of other statutory support, have created a situation where those who were already disadvantaged now face outright poverty.

As for the voluntary sector organisations that serve them, most of those that responded to our survey are operating in a state of crisis, in which many of them have to fight for their own survival by reducing their services or changing the way they work at the same time as demand is on the increase (see case study 6.3). Cuts that one organisation makes to its service almost always appear to have a ripple effect throughout the sector and service provision in general. Therefore, even if an organisation has not been forced to cut its own provision it might still be affected by the cuts indirectly. (see case study 6.2) Additionally, because investment is diverted from more preventative services, it is to be feared that demand to address complex problems among the audiences the voluntary sector typically deals with, will continue to increase further (see case study 6.1).

In light of the richness of information the survey generated, it is virtually impossible to capture all of it in one report. The following will therefore concentrate on a few areas that stood out as being particularly hard-hit. First, a concise overview of the key statistics will be given. Then, focus will be made on the areas of children/youth and advice services in the broadest sense as a way of providing an insight into the daily reality on the "frontline."

2. Summary

Key statistics – See page 5

58 percent of respondent organisations had made cuts to their own services and 70 percent were aware of other organisations that their service users rely on having made cuts. Children and youth services have been particularly hard hit and over 50 percent of our respondents considered that children and young people have been disproportionately affected by the recession and the subsequent cuts. 17 percent registered rising demand for children and youth related services and the same percentage noted stiff demand for advice services in the broadest sense. With regard to these particular services respondents were more likely to say that they were unable to meet demand.

Children and young people – See page 9

Services for children and young people are cut at a time when there is mounting evidence of these age groups suffering the effects of the recession, leading to increased incidence of anxiety, depression and self harm.

Financial pressures on families – See page 9

The financial noose around families' necks is tightening, leading to serious repercussions for children and young people, potentially limiting their long-term perspectives. Respondents are witnessing stronger demand for regular help with meeting basic needs, including but not limited to food.

Social poverty – See page 11

Tight finances are leading to social poverty, which prevents children and young people from disadvantaged households from participating in simple leisure activities. Organisations ranging from local football clubs to scout groups are experiencing stronger demand for low-cost or free provision, but the more they subsidise those who cannot afford to pay, the more they may be putting their ability to provide the service at risk.

Reducing prevention – See page 13

Austerity dictates that scarce resources are dedicated to the ongoing crisis, thereby directing resources away from preventative services. According to many of our respondents, this means that increasingly people are being allowed to drift towards crisis before qualifying for services.

Advice, advocacy and counselling – Helping people navigate a complex environment – See page 14

The multiple and reinforcing effects of the recession and the subsequent cuts to benefits and services are creating a situation that is hard to come to terms with, not only financially, but also psychologically. In this climate, there is stiff demand for advice, advocacy and counselling in order to help people navigate this tricky environment. But only less than a quarter of organisations active in this area said that they were able to meet demand. At a time when there is a strong need for advice around benefits and for appeals against unjust decisions, Legal Aid reform will mean that precisely these areas are no longer covered, allowing even more people to slip into a preventable crisis.

3. Key statistics

The responses came from a highly diverse sample, with organisations ranging from toy libraries to hostels for homeless people. Respondents were almost all from the third sector. A breakdown of responses by geographical remit is below and shows that there was a good spread of respondents across Greater Manchester. As would be expected, due to the higher number of organisations in Manchester, organisations working in Manchester roughly accounted for one quarter of the respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' geographical remit

Geographical remit	Percentage of responses (rounded)
All of Greater Manchester	16
Outside of Greater Manchester	1
Bolton	12
Bury	12
Manchester	23
Oldham	13
Rochdale	14
Salford	11
Stockport	8
Tameside	7
Trafford	8
Wigan	13

The majority of organisations had either made cuts to their own provision and/or knew of other organisations that their service users rely on having made cuts. Organisations appear more aware of the cuts of other organisations if they have had to make their own cuts.

Table 2: Cuts in the third sector

	Percentage of responses (rounded)
Cuts to own services	58
No cuts to own services	36
Awareness of other organisations' cuts	70
No awareness of other organisations' cuts	30

Respondents were asked to provide details of their own cuts and of those they are aware of in other organisations. In order to come to grips with the wide range of service types that emerged from these responses, 41 categories were created, comprising those on type of people affected (BME, carers, volunteers, etc.), service type (i.e. advice, day services, financial assistance, etc.) and organisational measures (i.e. loss of staff, started charging for services, etc.). Organisations' responses could be assigned to more than one category if applicable. Only a few of these contain a significant number of responses and are shown in the table below.

Table 3: Service categories with high responses

Category	Respondents that made cuts in % (base: 149 organisations)	Respondents aware of others' cuts in % (base: 178 organisations)
Children	14	9
Housing	10	10
Learning	14	7
Leisure	18	2
Mental health	10	7
Youth	22	18

It is clear from the above that Greater Manchester is experiencing a worrying level of cuts in services related to children and youth. This is in line with national trends in divestment from youth services, which have received much coverage in the media. The youth services that have been cut or reduced affect many different areas, such as mental health, housing, advice, leisure, learning, disability, employment. In addition, provision such as after school clubs, play schemes and youth clubs have been affected. This clearly includes provision that would be considered quite vital.

Even with “softer, less vital” services that appear more expendable at first glance, the complete or partial loss of youth clubs, as well as after-school and play provision will impact on parents’ ability to work and the ability of children and young people to find meaningful activities that are also affordable. Further, it could be argued that almost all areas of young people’s lives are affected. As one respondent put it, “We are in danger of alienating a whole generation.”

Congruent with this, half of the respondents to our survey cited young people as the population group that has been disproportionately affected by the cuts. In addition, children, families and lone parents respectively were considered by 20 percent of the respondents to be disproportionately affected. Based on this, it appears clear that families with dependent children have been particularly hard-hit. This was followed closely by those who thought that disabled people (33 percent) and older people (35 percent) were most affected. Only 4 percent agreed with the statement “There are no groups that are disproportionately affected.”

The authors of a recent Young Foundation report noted similar groups of people as being affected by a variety of different cuts: “The cumulative impacts were most evident among families, where a lack of affordable childcare meant a restriction in available employment opportunities, and among the long-term disabled and those with low to moderate needs.”¹ Along with cuts in services, and sometimes as a result of services closing, demand for services has also increased. More than 70 percent of our

¹ Ibid, p.28

respondents had noticed an increase in demand for their services. There was a great variety of services for which demand had increased, making it difficult to draw conclusions. However, services that were mentioned by ten percent or more of the respondents include those in the following categories:

- Counselling/Advice 17 %
- Children and Youth 17 %
- Leisure 10 %
- Advocacy 10%

Again it is services for children and youth that are particularly affected by increasing demand, shedding additional light on the severity of the situation for children and young people. Analysis of the types of services that were mentioned in connection with heightened demand for youth provision shows that mental health needs in particular are increasing among young people. In addition, there is a rise in demand for meaningful pastimes such as after-school clubs, youth clubs, holiday provision, etc. Some services that are facing a rise in demand relate to prevention (i.e. sexual health, offending) and employability. It is therefore fair to argue that there is a lot of demand for youth services that could make a significant contribution to supporting youth in becoming more resilient and balanced. This is particularly salient in light of the fact that Greater Manchester is greatly affected by youth unemployment, with some areas having as many as one in five young people who are out of work.²

But the figures on demand also show a second significant cluster of services that are particularly affected by the recession, this time in terms of rising demand for counselling, advice and advocacy. It is not surprising that the demand for counselling and advice has gone up, in light of the fact that the cuts have created much need for people to reorient themselves and seek advice on a changed or worsened situation. Directly related to this is the heightened demand for advocacy, in connection with debt and benefits, as well as homelessness and Employment Support Allowance appeals.

It is also interesting that the demand for leisure activities provided by the third sector seems to have increased. Some of this is explained by the fact that many of the leisure activities that were mentioned are aimed at individuals with special needs, such as those with disabilities and older people. However, generally speaking there is perhaps an indication that leisure activities, including sports and arts, provided by the third sector are more affordable and therefore more popular in times of austerity. In a context of mounting pressures on family finances and an increasing number of children living in “households where parents were making choices between breakfast and

² Linton, Deborah (11 May 2012) *Revealed: One in five youngsters out of work in Greater Manchester youth unemployment hotspots*, menmedia.co.uk

dinner, heating the house or having shoes for school”³ it is clear that for many families mainstream leisure activities have already moved out of reach, which in turn reflects powerfully on the quality of life for children and young people in austerity Britain.

As for the ability to meet demand, it is significant that whilst respondents were generally equally divided into those that were able and those that were not able to meet demand for the services outlined above, the balance is tipped towards organisations not being able to meet demand. It appears that children and youth services are cut in a time when there is heightened demand for them, thus producing a double-whammy. However, the largest difference between organisations that are able to meet demand and those that are not is in the category of counselling/advice: less than a quarter of the organisations said they were able to meet demand at the moment.

³ Ramesh, Randeep (6 July 2012): “Children’s charities warn number of troubled families will soar”
www.guardian.co.uk

4. Qualitative Analysis

As we have seen above two broad areas emerge from the above-mentioned headline statistics as being particularly badly hit by the recession and the cuts that followed it. The first area is children and youth, the second area covers advice, advocacy and counselling. In order to give a better idea of the situation on the ground, we decided to carry out a contextual analysis of the qualitative data contained in 65 of the survey responses. This more in-depth look shows the demands that characterise the everyday operating environment of organisations working in these fields.

4.1. Children and young people

Services for young people are being cut and communities and their voluntary sector organisations are struggling to close the gaps. As we have seen above, services that have suffered cuts include those that would objectively be seen as improving young people's life chances and thus quite essential. This support is being cut at a time when there is evidence of children and young people suffering from the effects of the recession. Dependent children and young people cannot help but be affected by their parents' financial situation and worries and tension around this will usually be felt by them. Young people who are moving towards independence cannot but be discouraged by the gloomy outlook the economy has in store for them (see case study 6.2).

Not surprisingly, a respondent from a mental health organisation that serves all age groups noted an increase in anxiety, depression and self-harm among young people in particular. A respondent from an organisation that works with young people who are deemed at risk noted that the harder to reach young people might completely miss out on services, because there is less capacity to reach out to these individuals.

A community centre pointed out that there is an emerging need for after-school provision, including homework clubs. It is not hard to see how the lack of such provision could affect parents' ability to work and make a living and/or children's potential success in school, both of which are factors that are closely related to long-term life chances.

What is more, the quality of existing services may be driven down by cuts in training provision. As a respondent from a pre-school nursery noted, training, resources and support for early-years staff have degenerated to such an extent that her staff are now less qualified than before.

4.2. Financial pressures on families

The financial noose around families' necks is tightening, leading to serious repercussions for children and young people and potentially limiting their long-term perspectives. This is a national trend that reverberated strongly in the

responses to our survey. More than half of Greater Manchester districts have more than 20 percent of children in poverty.⁴

A recent report by the organisation Save the Children finds that only 1 out of 5 parents in poverty have not had to borrow money to pay for essentials, such as food or clothes, in the past year.⁵ It is not hard to see that this makes them very vulnerable to unethical lenders, in the absence of mainstream consumer credit. Findings of a survey conducted by Netmums suggests that “a quarter of families are living on credit cards, five percent take payday loans and one in 1000 have turned to loan sharks to stay afloat.”⁶ One organisation that serves an estate in Greater Manchester observed that debt levels have driven residents into the arms of loan sharks and pay day lenders and can even force people to resort to criminal activities in order to pay back their debt.

Our respondents are witnessing stronger demand for help with meeting basic needs, including but not limited to food. This is in line with a recently reported national trend of food bank activity. According to this, the Trussell Trust, which runs food banks across Britain, has opened two new centres a week from April 2011 to April 2012 to meet what the Guardian called “an explosion in demand from families living on the breadline.”⁷ According to this article, “The number of people to whom it had issued emergency food parcels had doubled ... and was set to increase further as rising living costs, shrinking incomes and welfare cuts take their toll.” More importantly, the vast majority of customers came regularly, when in the past typical foodbank customers only came once for help with a temporary crisis.

This was echoed by one of the respondents to our survey who noted that the need for food is not an occasional one but rather has become a chronic need for many people who need food handouts “to help them cope day to day.” One church has seen the number of homeless/disadvantaged people coming to the church for food increase “at an alarming rate.” One respondent said that for some people buying new items is out of the question and even the charity shops would be too pricey for them. Organisations have seen an increase in demand for items ranging from food, to clothes and low-cost furniture, as well as toy parcels for Christmas.

⁴ *Child poverty map of the UK*, End Child Poverty, London (2012), p. 26

⁵ Whitham, Graham (2012) *It shouldn't happen here – Child poverty in 2012*, Save the Children: London, p.2

⁶ Netmums (2012) *Families in Crisis*, www.netmums.com/home/netmums-campaigns/families-in-crisis, accessed in February 2012

⁷ Butler, Patrick (April 26, 2012) *Foodbank handouts double as more families end up on the breadline*, Guardian.co.uk

4.3. Social poverty

It is no wonder that in a context such as this, cultural, sports and leisure activities in general are increasingly moving out of some families' reach. According to research published by Save the Children, nearly 20 percent of parents in poverty told the organisation's researchers that their children have to go without new shoes when they need them. Nearly the same percentage of children living in poverty go without having a warm coat in winter, so it is no wonder that leisure activities are extremely curtailed for such families. For example, even things that could count as simple pleasures, such as having friends over for tea and swimming lessons, are out of reach for many of these families.⁸

It appears that this is also happening in Greater Manchester, resulting in higher demand for the free or low-cost activities for children and young people that the voluntary sector provides on the one hand and a fall in demand due to adverse financial impacts of the recession on beneficiaries on the other.

Many organisations write that they have experienced an increase in demand for low-price or free leisure activities. A community football club reported that over half of its players have become unemployed, therefore unable to pay subscriptions, and a community sports club is faced with increasing demand for free memberships due to unemployment. Similarly, a community arts centre noted free arts activities for 6-12 year olds as an emerging need and more young people now participate in its free Saturday morning workshops. Two friends of the park groups commented on how people increasingly embrace the importance of their green spaces for free leisure activities. One respondent noted that the use of their park has increased "due to the severity of austere times for relaxation and enjoyment instead of weekends away and holidays."

A toy library has seen rising demand for the loan of play resources and guiding and scouting associations are becoming more popular. The respondents from guide/scouting associations attributed this popularity to the fact that they offer cheap pastimes. They also noted their unmet need for additional volunteer group leaders in order to accommodate the rising demand for membership, including from more children with special needs. Yet, nevertheless these groups also have to reduce how much they can do, as "parents are finding it difficult to pay for things like outings and holidays."

Similarly, an organisation that offers wheelchair racing has noticed that fewer parents can now afford to bring their children to such leisure activities. According to some of our respondents, parents of disabled children and young people are finding it increasingly difficult to pay for the transport their children need in order to access education, training and sports activities; a

⁸ Whitham (2012) p. 9

fact that is underlined by reports about parents of disabled children having to take out loans to buy basic everyday essentials.⁹

Where third sector organisations and initiatives are subsidising those who are unable to afford even the low cost they charge for activities, this will ultimately have adverse effects on the funding of these organisations and thus affect their ability to continue offering the service (see case study 6.3).

Although the low-cost or free provision of such activities is often seen as a luxury that can rightfully fall victim to cuts first, the point that many of our respondents are making is that the softer types of provision, which mainly focus on how children and young people spend their free time, are equally important for producing well-adjusted young people who are prepared for life's challenges. As one respondent wrote: "The lack of positive useful activities leaves young people without a sense of purpose or challenge and without the means to move out of or beyond the barriers they face and develop positive peer networks."

Another respondent observed: "Young people need a focus if they cannot find work. They need to feel valued." A recent Young Foundation report on the impact of the cuts in Camden highlights the important role the provision of meaningful activities plays for young people who often are affected by material hardship and cramped living conditions: "Local services, and most notably youth clubs, provide important coping mechanisms for the pressures that young people were facing, creating a network of peer support and a place for belonging."¹⁰

Unfortunately, it appears that these sorts of activities tend to be viewed as "luxuries" or optional in the current climate of austerity. Communities that want to continue to provide such activities for their youth therefore appear to be largely left with picking up the pieces, whilst organisations that are already offering such activities are struggling with meeting heightened demand for them.

A community development officer employed by a charitable housing provider records a large level of interest to improve the situation: "Groups in particular are looking at developing projects and services for young people in their areas as the cuts have dramatically affected what services were being facilitated by the public sector." An infrastructure organisation noted a trend among the youth sector to cut small-scale provision, whilst big projects are continuing. Its job to support organisations in this sector appears to be quite hard in light of "obstruction from the public sector in the attempt to keep their provision." According to this, organisations working with young people often need hands-on support and cover to be able to continue their provision in light of this crisis.

⁹ Gentleman, Amelia (24 May 2012): "A third of parents of disabled children took out loans to buy basics last year" www.guardian.co.uk

¹⁰ *An insight into the impact of the cuts on some of the most vulnerable in Camden*, Young Foundation, London (2012), p.14

Cuts to good-quality affordable after-school or leisure activities amount to more than the fact that young people are a bit bored in their free time. As one respondent noted: "With the integration of education welfare officers, Connexions workers ... into Young People's Workers, there has been a large reduction in the universal resource for young people. There have also been reductions in the capacity of other statutory services to young people. At the same time, we are facing an increase in demand, and being told about growing concern for 16-24 year olds who are finding it harder to get a job. This is a serious problem now but it is the longer term consequences that are most serious." Especially in Greater Manchester, demand for provision for children and young people is set to grow further in future, in light of the "mini baby boom" that has boosted the conurbation's population over the past ten years.¹¹

4.4. Reducing prevention

It appears that austerity often dictates that scarce resources be dedicated to the ongoing crisis, thereby redirecting resources away from preventative services. Many of our respondents made this point in different ways, with many of them explicitly stating that the cuts are made in such a way that crisis situations are inevitable. In the area of children and youth, this means that increasingly families are allowed to drift towards crisis before becoming eligible for services. For example, an organisation working with children and families had seen an increase in referrals with a level of need that was problematic to meet with a volunteer-run service; such interventions really require the involvement of a social worker. Whereas referrals at this level used to be at 3 percent they have now risen to 20.

Someone from a domestic violence organisation described a situation where the lack of prevention and extended support systems has meant that the organisation is "seeing a massive increase in re-referrals. Services are now geared towards extreme situations where a family has reached crisis or suffered serious injury/death. No services are available prior to this." A homelessness provider states: "We have seen an increase in demand from people in crisis and with mental health problems." Another respondent concurred and pointed out the monetary dimension of this trend: "Many young people do not have access to the more universal support that prevented more expensive services being needed." A colleague from a housing provider agrees: "As further cuts to services continue, more and more people will slip through the net. Services will need to focus on those with severe needs However, many people in the areas in which we work have mild to moderate issues and would be unable to use services provided."

¹¹ "Greater Manchester's growing population – Census 2011," thinking: New Economy Briefing 24, Manchester: September 2012, p. 4, accessed online at:

http://neweconomymanchester.com/stories/1108-thinking_new_economy

5. Advice, advocacy and counselling – Helping people navigate a complex environment

An important preventative area that is coming under pressure is services in the area of advice/advocacy/counselling. As mentioned above, less than a quarter of the organisations in this category said they were able to meet demand at the moment. The multiple and reinforcing effects of the recession and the subsequently introduced cuts to benefits and services are creating a situation that is very hard to get to terms with, financially but also psychologically (see case study 6.2). Not surprisingly, the demand for all types of advice, including counselling and advocacy, is intense, but tragically this is happening at the same time as advice and advocacy services are being cut.

The survey evidence overwhelmingly suggests that a gap is beginning to open up in advice and advocacy services. It is worth noting that the evidence does not primarily come from organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, whose main remit is advice, but also from other types of organisations, such as community centres, specialist infrastructure organisations and service providers. There is an indication that in view of general advice services having been cut and/or being in a transition due to the legal aid reform, people are increasingly turning for advice to any organisation that they happen to know, many of them community centres.

As one respondent wrote: “Services cut [elsewhere]... have increased demand for services from the community centre as they have nowhere to go to for these services.” Some of these organisations had previously been forced to cut advice services, only to experience an increase in demand for advice while others experienced this demand for advice services as an emerging need. While some organisations simply had no choice but to turn people away, others were hoping to improve their ability to meet demand. However, most organisations seemed to view their future ability to tackle the situation rather pessimistically. For example, an organisation providing housing for homeless people noted that cuts in local authority provision have meant that there are fewer housing support services to refer their clients to. As a result, more demands are placed on the organisation for help with housing, benefits and debt advice, a demand that it is unable to meet at the moment and will be less able to do so in future.

One organisation serving looked-after children and children with disabilities had noticed an increased demand for its advocacy service, helping clients access services that meet their needs. A mental health organisation reported that it had had to cut its welfare and housing rights advice service by 60 percent and was also aware of widespread cuts to other organisations’ advice provision.

One area of particular concern among our respondents is the need for advice and advocacy generated by the benefits reform. Not only do people need advice in order to understand the new requirements, but many also need help

to appeal against unfair decisions. The latest edition of *Advice Trends* shows that benefit problems are now 35 percent of all problems the Citizens Advice Bureaux across the country are dealing with, up from 32 percent in 2011. Benefit enquiries are thus more popular than debt, which used to be the most popular topic.¹² According to one respondent to our survey, people are having their benefits cut without having access to adequate information about subsequent alternatives or choices to cope with the situation. An infrastructure organisation in the health sector commented on the increase in demand for advice and advocacy despite not being a service provider: “We have seen an increased demand on us for information, advice, signposting, support to challenge decisions.”

Two organisations whose remit is advice giving are both unable to meet current demand. In a Citizens Advice Bureau cuts have affected its outreach service in local authority buildings, and a Law Centre had to cut services across the board. According to both, the number of cases that involve welfare benefits appeals has risen sharply, a demand neither of them is able to meet. In addition to this, the changes expected due to Legal Aid reform – removal of benefits and debt advice – are likely to take their toll. According to the CAB, 80 percent of enquiries are about debt and benefits advice and according to the Law Centre, legal aid changes will mean that “there will be no specialised help in most areas of civil law,” including debt and benefits advice. Yet, it has been shown that the assistance of a representative in disability and employment support allowance appeals results in 15 percent more appeals being successful.¹³ According to information put together by False Economy and Citizen’s Advice Bureau 70 percent of people who attend an appeal with a Citizen’s Advice Bureau officer or lawyer successfully overturn the government’s decision, compared to 40 percent of people who do not have this support.¹⁴

One respondent commented on the wider wellbeing implications of scarcity of advice provision: “With CAB and other advice services not doing as much outreach or appointments, people are not looking for the help out there and they feel isolated and alone with their debt.” It is not difficult to see how the overall situation, with pressures mounting on already disadvantaged individuals, can affect people’s mental health. As one respondent puts it: “changes to the benefits system and financial instability are increasingly leading to stress, greater social exclusion, as well as discrimination towards people with mental ill health.” Similarly, a Netmums survey concluded that “16 percent of parents are being treated for a stress-related illness due to lack of cash.”¹⁵

¹² *Advicetrends 2012/13 quarter 1*, Citizens Advice, London: 2012, p. 9

¹³ Disability Law Service (2011) *Disability Living Allowance. How to Make a DLA Appeal*, p. 9 http://www.dls.org.uk/advice/factsheet/factsheets_download.html, accessed in October 2012

¹⁴ Lakhani, Nina (2012) “Paralympic sponsor engulfed by disability tests row,” *The Independent*, 29 August, 2012

¹⁵ Netmums (2012)

A diverse set of organisations has commented on the rising need for mental health provision, particularly counselling. Whilst some of these organisations were mental health providers, others were engaged in unrelated work. For example, respondents noted an increase in mental health needs among refugees and asylum seekers, young people and homeless people. Figures from the Rochdale-based Petrus Hub show an increase in service users whose primary support need was in mental health from 74 in 2010 to 156 in 2011.¹⁶ A mental health provider had registered a growing need for counselling across the board. A statutory source also noted that the demand for therapy had increased at a time when this particular service had been cut and consequently was not able to satisfy demand.

It could be argued that by restricting access to services such as general advice, advocacy and counselling, individuals will have to struggle more to come to grips with their situation and the less resourceful of these will slip into a state of crisis. An organisation that provides counselling in addition to a wide range of other services has seen a 58 percent rise in counselling clients. Apparently the severity of issues raised in counselling had also risen, with nearly 50 percent of all cases having attempted suicide prior to counselling. Consequently, a number of respondents identify preventative work as a gap that has materialised as a result of the cuts and one public sector contact sees crisis as an emerging need due to a “cumulation of debt, housing, health issues.”

¹⁶ Landreth, David (2012) *Mental Health Worsening*, Petrus News April 2012, p. 2

6. Appendix: Case studies

6.1. Home-Start, North Manchester

Home-Start North Manchester is a charity that recruits and trains local parent volunteers to provide weekly emotional and practical home visiting support to families with at least one child under the age of 5 years. Prevention of crisis and the need for statutory intervention by acquainting families with services and facilities in the wider community is at the heart of Home-Start's work with families. On a care continuum ranging from level 1 (children have no additional identified needs) to level 3 (children with complex needs), the organisation aims to work primarily with families who are on level 2 (children have identified additional needs).

However, since the recession and the concomitant cuts, the organisation has faced a two-fold impact: loss of funding and a shift towards working less preventatively. Homestart North Manchester used to be commissioned by SureStart and the local authority, but lost all of its LA funding and is now simply housed at the SureStart Centre as a tenant. Although the organisation has managed to obtain a variety of grant funding to replace some of the lost LA funding, it has had to reduce its activities by half. Two family support workers and one family support coordinator had to be made redundant and/or did not obtain an extension of their contracts. With their departure, the capacity to help 90 families and support 25 volunteers per year has been lost.

At the same time capacity losses at the LA have meant that Home-Start is increasingly pressured by social workers from the LA to deal with families that have complex needs and children on protection plans. According to Shelley Byrne: "In the year 2010/11, 95 percent of referrals received were for families fitting into this category (at level 2) and five percent for families at level 3. In contrast, in 2011/12 20 percent of referrals have been for level 3 families."

According to Shelley, in these cases social workers are almost relying on Home Start for monitoring and surveillance, due to the impossible demands on their own workload. Also, the families are pressured to take up Home-Start services in these cases, which violates one of Home-Start's key principles that families be supported voluntarily. This also means that volunteers often have to work with families that have not really bought into the service and this can be very de-motivating. Therefore, volunteer retention has become a problem for Home-Start, leading to an increasing need to hire paid staff with specific skills in supporting such families. At the same time, the Home-Start coordinators, whose job is to support the volunteers who work with families, are spending more of their time performing social work roles, such as ensuring that other professionals do their jobs and chasing up things.

The long-term support Home-Start provides is unique, making the organisation the preferred choice of social workers, for whom it is not possible to provide direct intensive support themselves. The other option, the LA's Early Intervention Team, offers support that is usually short-term and of a non-dependent nature. As a result, they are often able to meet demand,

whereas Home-Start's waiting list is long due to the long-term nature of their support.

This leads to a situation where Home-Start is forced to devote more time and resources to working with higher need families while work at the more preventative level suffers. According to Shelley, this might very well lead to more and more families drifting towards crisis situations and eventually put even more strain on the resources.

6.2. Beacon Counselling, Stockport

Beacon Counselling is a registered charity that provides a range of counselling and related services to adults, young people, and children. Beacon provides services across the borough of Stockport and beyond, with services for adults from six venues in Stockport and three in Wythenshawe. It provides services to young people from 12 secondary schools across Stockport and Macclesfield and through Beacon 2, a service for young people outside of the school system. The organisation's portfolio also includes counselling at primary schools and a stress management programme for parents.

Set up in 1984, Beacon has grown by around 30 percent per year for the last three years since the first effects of the recession were beginning to be felt. For example, from 2010 to 2011 the increase in adults was from 620 to 816 and in young people from 530 to 658. According to the Beacon annual report, this increase in demand reflects "to an extent the impact of the recession and the cuts on people's lives and the support available."¹⁷ Although the organisation has not had to cut its own services, it reported that its service users are very much affected by the cuts that have been made by others, resulting in increased demand. At the time of the survey, the organisation could not keep up with demand, but was expecting to increase its ability to do so in future.

According to Beacon's General Manager, James Harper, "mental health and well-being have deteriorated" in the wake of the recession. It appears that whilst pressure has been rising across the board, young people in particular are affected by gloomy future prospects and pressures to "adhere to a particular lifestyle and image."¹⁸ For example, James notes that Stockport has seen an increase in young people with anxiety and depression, as well as those who are at risk of self-harm. Counselling services for young people are thus vital in order to help them cope with the situation.

The organisation's annual report highlights counselling as a service that improves individuals' ability to weather the storm in their external environment, as well as preventing worse problems from happening: "People benefit through better coping skills for hard times in the future. This means

¹⁷ *Beacon Activity Report 2011*, Stockport: Beacon Counselling, p. 7

¹⁸ Beacon, p. 21

that people feel better now *and* have greater resilience.”¹⁹ After six counselling sessions, users of the service reported close-to-maximum scores in their ability to cope and in reduced stress levels, among others.

Young service users saw long-term benefits such as improved attendance and behaviour at school and improved self-esteem. Service users who were not in education at the time of entering counselling were regularly enabled to turn their lives around by returning to education, taking up further education or gaining employment. As the co-ordinator for this type of counselling notes: “I believe this free service is extremely worthwhile especially in this current economic climate. I am all too aware that funding may be an issue for Beacon and am extremely grateful to James and the team in trying to keep this service going.”²⁰

6.3. Merehall FC, Bolton

Merehall FC is a local football team from Halliwell, a rather deprived area in Bolton. The team has been playing in the Bolton Sunday League for many years, initially sponsored by Astley Bridge. Most recently it had funded its participation in the Sunday League through small grants from Bolton CVS, which covered equipment and pitch hire. However, at the time of club manager Trevor Lester’s response to our survey, the future did not look bright. Merehall FC’s funding was running out and although it had been encouraged to apply again for the new season, the likelihood of the funding being significantly less was high, as the size of grants being given out by Bolton CVS has reduced.

At the same time, the club increasingly saw the cost for hiring pitches go up, in the end forcing it to change its training schedule. Whereas previously the team was able to afford training indoors twice a week, now training only takes place once a week on an outdoor pitch. Trevor knows of two Bolton teams who have folded because of their inability to accommodate the rising cost. As a result, the demand for joining Merehall FC has outstripped its ability to take on new players, as it can only afford to operate two teams, with a total of 30 players. Apparently, this also affects other teams: “The number of football teams playing in local leagues has fallen dramatically in the past 12 months. Two years ago the local Sunday League had over 60 teams, last year it was around 45, this year’s total is fewer than 35. In season 2012/13 seven local teams in Bolton have had to fold altogether because of a lack of funding,” according to Trevor.

In order to be a member of the local Sunday League, teams must be played and run by amateurs. Yet, it seems that the costs of being considered part of the Sunday League are significant. Membership of the League costs £150 per team per season and a registration fee per player of £5. In addition, the club has to be affiliated to the county FA, which is not free either. Merehall’s

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 6

²⁰ Ibid, p. 22

players currently are required to pay subscriptions of £3 per week, in addition to a £10 registration fee, but these subscriptions merely cover weekly expenses, such as referee's fee, first aid kit, and replacement kits. It is not difficult to see why local clubs are struggling under these circumstances and the Sunday League's membership is plummeting.

Expecting players to make up for the gap in funding is quite unrealistic, especially in a deprived area like Halliwell. According to Trevor, "Funding in this area alone is being savagely cut to the bone, especially to local sports and social events, something you think wouldn't happen in an Olympic year. ... You can't ask your players to contribute more than they already do, especially if they're out of work or have young families." And at the time, 17 of Merehall's 30 players had lost their jobs and were being subsidised by the club. However, it was already clear to Trevor that this can't go on indefinitely: "... if this continues they will not be able to afford to play. We can only subsidise them to a degree."