

Executive Summary and Norfolk Case Paper

Year 1 of the CCS programme:
Evaluation and learning

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The Children's Society is proud to be working in partnership with the following organisations to deliver the Coordinated Community Support Programme

**The
Children's
Society**



Year 1 of the Coordinated Community Support Programme, Evaluation Executive Summary

About the Coordinated Community Support Programme

The Children's Society (TCS), in partnership with several organisations including Buttle UK, the Lloyds Bank Foundation, Children in Need, The Church of England, The Legal Education Foundation, The Local Government Association (LGA), Trust for London, Smallwood Trust, Stepchange and Trussell Trust are delivering the Coordinated Community Support (CCS) Programme.

The initial aims of the programme were twofold. Firstly, to address the gap in emergency support provision left following the elimination of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants through better networking of different local agencies (including the Local Authority) involved in the provision of emergency assistance. Secondly, to reduce repeat instances of financial crisis by addressing underlying causes of crises, as well as the immediate emergency.

Five themes - the programme aims to improve outcomes including:

- Improving **access** to crisis support schemes
- A simpler, supported, **application process**
- Addressing **underlying needs** to prevent the recurrence of crisis
- Providing **aftercare**
- A commitment to ongoing **learning**

Four Pilot Sites selected as the focus

- Norfolk
- Oldham
- Swansea
- Tower Hamlets

Three Theories of Change were developed in the early stages of the programme

- Tier 1 – Impact on people accessing services
- Tier 2 – Impact on local systems
- Tier 3 – Impact on national systems

The CCS Programme works within four different local authority areas to setup pilot projects providing support, guidance and resources to local community organisations to better coordinate crisis provision. The programme invites organisations in each local pilot site to develop workstreams to contribute to the five thematic areas with an overarching coordination objective. A central CCS team, hosted by the Children's Society, provides programme management support.

In addition to the funded workstreams, the programme has delivered facilitation of meetings between organisations and supporting them with responses to Covid-19. Taking a collaborative approach, the programme seeks to develop new ways of supporting people facing financial crisis through the sharing of ideas, direct funding and supporting applications to welfare support. The programme also seeks to influence national systems by bringing policy makers and funders closer to the experiences of local people.

About the evaluation

Cloud Chamber were invited by TCS and partners to conduct an independent formative and summative evaluation of the programme. This report is an account of Year 1 of the programme. The main data sources for this report include workstream case studies, monitoring data, interviews with the CCS Programme team, observation of partnership meetings and facilitation of pilot-site outcome-setting sessions.

A responsive programme: Covid-19

Implementation plans were drafted in each Local Authority in early 2020. However, due Covid-19, many of the workstreams were adapted to respond to the challenges arising within communities. The overall objective of ‘access to crisis support’ has remained constant for the programme while priorities around ‘access’ have changed and workstreams have adapted accordingly:

- Pre-pandemic workstreams had a focus on **improving access** to support and appointments through funding translation, transport and some co-designed services. These workstreams were paused or reconfigured.
- Covid-19 workstreams have a focus on **timely access** through provision of food, furniture and advice in a timely and Covid-safe setting via trusted agencies.

A summary of workstreams is shown in the table below:

Swansea	Oldham	Norfolk	Tower Hamlets
Citizen’s Advice Swansea Food Parcel Leaflet (£110)	Ancora KeyRing food parcel leaflet (£55)	Leeway: Smallwood funding for homestart packs (£4,500)	Island Advice / Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN): School referral project (£5,000)
Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) Centralised Hardship fund (£9,000)*	Ancora Keyring Emergency hardship fund (£3,125)	Norfolk Citizen’s Advice: Grant Awareness project (£7,600)	Mulberry School food and advice service (£20,000)*
Housing Justice Cymru, Citadel (£12,883)	REEL clothing bank (£3,200)	Norfolk Citizen’s Advice: Digital Inclusion project (£1,200)	RSS Training session with Northgate and Tower Hamlets local authority (no cost)
The Wallich Home Starter packs (£2,625)	SAWN Furniture and Extended services (£9,650)*	Norfolk Community Law Service: Family Solicitor Expansion (£5,000)	
		Norwich Integration Partnership: joint project (£16,298)*	
		Norfolk Community Advice Network: Development and staffing resource for NCAN system (£6,552)	

Note: Workstreams in **bold font** are case studies in this evaluation. Those marked with an * have additional resource funding from leveraged sources explained in more detail in the full report.

The programme actively brought organisations responding to the Covid-19 crisis together and offered a chance to exchange experiences and understanding the emerging needs resulting from lockdown. Cloud Chamber observed these sessions, and the ways in which Covid-19 prompted rapid adaptation for organisations to be able to help people in financial crisis. While coordination remains the primary objective of the programme, there has been acknowledgement that Covid-19 has had a double-edged impact on this objective:

- Firstly, Covid-19 has catalysed rapid adaptation and relationship building between VCS organisations to identify and implement solutions quickly.
- Secondly, Covid-19 has left some organisations with little time, space or resource to codesign long-term sustainable coordinated projects.

It is possible that the relationships forged between organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic will be sustained.

- *“We forged a relationship with [another VCS org] and I’m hoping it will continue.”* (partner during a partnership call during lockdown Spring 2020)

CCS adding value and capacity

The CCS team has contributed local provision of crisis support and local systems change in the following ways:

- **CCS as a broker:** organisations in the pilot sites, especially VCS organisations, value the brokerage role that the CCS team have played. This has taken place both through facilitating CCS-programme meetings and through direct contact between organisations.
- **CCS as an asset-identifier:** since the ‘bringing together’ of organisations through the programme, further catalysed through the needs arising because of Covid-19, organisations report an improved awareness and understanding of the strengths of other organisations in their local areas.
- **CCS workstreams welcomed as a non-target driven space:** some organisations funded to deliver workstreams report that the CCS programme is a space to ‘try’ new things and is refreshing when compared to the target-driven requirements from other funders. Organisations welcome the spirit of the programme.
- **CCS as a platform, boosting credibility:** there is some early evidence of VCS organisations feeling ‘seen and heard’ because of the facilitation of the CCS programme. Being involved in the programme has raised their profile in their localities and boosted their credibility. This is particularly the case for small, volunteer-led organisations.
- **Flexible, warm and responsive central CCS team is valued:** consulted stakeholders have really welcomed the relationships built with the CCS team and value their flexibility, especially in relation to Covid-19. Partners welcome the collaborative approach the team have taken. The team are increasingly being approached by local authorities for advice.
- **A blended approach of workstream funding and facilitation has been welcome:** The value of workstream funding combined with facilitation has been valued by partners.

Activity and output summary

Much of the energy of the programme in Year 1 has been focused on local systems change. At the time of writing, the programme is working with the four pilot sites to identify the steps needed to make ‘good’ coordination happen.

The CCS programme has delivered the following activities in Year 1 and distributed just over £100,000 of workstream funding:

- Promotion, engagement and partnership development
- Pilot site partnership meetings (26 meetings)
- Online grant awareness training (31 attendees)

- Development of the CCS Charter (26 organisations have signed up to the charter)
- Cross-pilot site partnership learning meetings (three meetings)
- Commissioned research on analysing different perspectives of crisis provision (ongoing)
- Support to develop 17 workstreams funded directly by CCS funding
- Leveraged £68,000 from additional sources to complement and add value

The CCS Team have engaged 368 professionals during Year 1 of the Programme; representing approximately 139 organisations across the four pilot sites. Further statistics demonstrating the level of engagement are shown in the table below.

	Norfolk	Oldham	Swansea	Tower Hamlets	Total
Number of people	142	78	76	72	368
Number VCS organisations	24	35	31	31	121
Number local authority, county council or other statutory	8	3	3	1	15
Number of schools	0	1	0	2	3

Workstream case studies

The key lessons from four workstream case studies across each of the pilot sites are summarised in the table below. This research formed a principal input to the evaluation.

Workstream	Summary	Learning emerging from case study
Norwich Integration Partnership (Norfolk)	<p>Norwich Integration Partnership (NIP) is a pre-existing partnership of three organisations (Bridge Plus, New Routes Integration & English+) supporting individuals with NRPF, migrants and asylum-seekers.</p> <p>With an expected reach of 250 clients CCS funding was provided to support a collaborative response to Covid-19. The funding helped proactively and collaboratively identify and support vulnerable clients through information sharing, supermarket vouchers, IT top-ups and other support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The case study highlights the important role of trust, and wider (non-crisis) related provision, in developing relationships and providing crisis support ○ A wide range of outcomes were seen, linked both to the response to Covid-19, and often in addition to the outcomes outlined in the CCS theory of change ○ <i>“We came closer together as a team of three organisations, with fewer overlaps in delivery; and much closer working - it really enhanced that.” (NIP Staff member)</i>
SAWN Furniture Packs and Additional Support (Oldham)	<p>Funding for SAWN to resume safe supply of furniture packs to vulnerable clients illegible for support via the Oldham LWAS (i.e. people with NRPF).</p> <p>SAWN also offer wider holistic and ongoing support, information and guidance. Some funding for fuel top-ups and other emergency costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The service is providing so much more than providing furniture to vulnerable residents; it is building trusted relationships with people, signposting to other services, helping with applications and informal aftercare. ○ The time taken to provide this service is not something SAWN are remunerated for directly although stakeholders in the borough, including the local authority and other VCS organizations, recognise and value this support.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o <i>“If we hadn’t had that time with her, those cups of tea, I don’t know what would have happened to her. She’s still alive. That’s an outcome. It’s a soft outcome. She’s come to understand what has happened to her, the trauma she’s experienced. We ask her what she wants. She finds her own solutions.” (SAWN)</i>
<p>Centralised Hardship Fund, EYST (Swansea)</p>	<p>The project managed by Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) is a centralised hardship fund accessible to local organisations to improve the access to crisis support of asylum seekers, refugees and those with no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>The fund focuses on IT equipment, data and phone top-ups, children’s needs (e.g. baby food) and other emergency costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The need to respond in a focused and rapid way to the Covid-19 crisis has led to stronger working relationships between organisations. o While the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the difficulty of offering face-to-face support, organisations successfully shifted delivery aspects to a remote model. o It was felt that remote approaches developed during the pandemic could be used in the future and would help to reduce, for example, unnecessary client expenditure on bus fares to attend appointments. o Recognising the value of face-to-face contact in building trust and understanding underlying needs, a balanced approach has the potential to improve both co-ordination between organisations and client outcomes in the longer-term. o <i>“I think the project has allowed us and our partners to develop our relationship with each other and more importantly with our clients.” (EYST team member)</i>
<p>Mulberry Food and Advice Service, (Tower Hamlets)</p>	<p>At the beginning of lockdown, staff at Mulberry School identified that certain products were disappearing from shops due to stockpiling – nappies, sanitary towels, lentils and flour for example.</p> <p>The service provided food parcels, household necessities, toiletries, and sanitary hygiene kits. The service included welfare referrals to the school social worker and local advice agency, Island Advice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The service was successful due to the commitment and dedication of teachers who volunteered their time and the funding leveraged by the CCS programme. o Referring families to Island Advice was new for the school and a successful example of coordination. Need for food and advice remains high in the borough although teachers are back to their “day job” and capacity is low. o <i>“[CCS team member] introduced us to Island Advice. As I understand it, the [CCS] programme brings together organisations that are struggling but all trying to achieve the same thing” (Mulberry School employee)</i>

Impact on people accessing services

Monitoring data from the programme shows at least 2,000 individuals have been supported directly through the programmes workstreams in 2020. The importance of trust between people who access services and organisations is frequently mentioned during our case study work and our evaluation encourages the programme to identify ways to support the VCS to harness and build upon these trusted relationships. Outcomes for people accessing services in Year 1 for those who have accessed a workstream include:

- o More likely to access support from the right place, quickly (access theme)
- o Access to a wider range of support services (underlying need theme)

- More dignified experience of accessing crisis support and systems (cross cutting theme)
- More able to trust someone who can help me
- Wellbeing is maintained or prevented from entering crisis
- More likely to have had support with additional needs (beyond immediate crisis)
- Mental and/or physical health is maintained
- Children are more likely to be able to engage with education

Impact on local systems

Much of the work in Year 1 of the CCS programme has been focused on building the foundations - the networks and relationships of organisations working at local, pilot site level. The CCS programme has offered a unique opportunity for organisations to communicate with each other in their localities, albeit virtually. In some cases, the CCS-facilitated meetings were the first time that organisations were made aware of one another.

Consulted stakeholders in the pilot sites have welcomed the relationships built with the CCS team and value their flexibility, especially in relation to Covid-19. Partners welcome the collaborative approach that the CCS team have taken. The team are increasingly being approached by local authorities for advice indicating that they have gained trust and credibility in the four pilot sites and have laid a good foundation for improving systems in Years 2 and 3. Outcomes for pilot sites in Year 1 include:

- Increasing levels of communication between organisations
- Increasing levels of trust between organisations
- Increased clarity of responsibilities and strengths of voluntary community sector (VCS) provision
- Agility of VCS is better understood
- Shared vision of the centrality of client journey
- Joint understanding of the importance of referral systems
- Building upon learning within the programme

The CCS programme seeks to influence local eco-systems i.e. relationships between organisations. This model assumes a set of preconditions or assumptions amongst practitioner and organisations for enabling this. These preconditions include willingness, skills and capacity of practitioners and organisations. It also assumes that the pathway to collaboration is inclusive for all organisation types (size, sector, subsector)

Impact on national systems

Much of the impact on national systems has been in direct response to Covid-19, bringing policy makers closer to the experiences of communities with regards to challenges around digital exclusion and access to Free School Meals. It was noted that many of the smaller organisations did not have other routes in to influence policy and practice, so this was an empowering part of the programme for them. TCS, together with others in the sector, have directly influenced some operational systems change at national level in response to Covid-19. Examples include:

- **MHCLG and the Treasury funding:** The Children’s Society was active in engaging with Central Government regarding financial hardship and Covid-19. An additional £63 million was provided by central government in June to be distributed to local authorities in England
- **Discretionary Assistance Fund (Welsh Government):** contribution of evidence to decision regarding provision of additional support to this fund. Subsequently, a further £11 million was allocated in May to the fund which supports individuals and families facing extreme financial hardship.

Looking forward

This full evaluation report invites the CCS Team and partners to ensure that Years 2 and 3 of the programme put emphasis on:

- **Responding to ‘additional’ needs:** we have seen how services have been supported beyond the immediate crisis presented – for example, brokering conversations with housing teams or helping register with a GP. While this does not go so far as addressing an *underlying* need it does address additional, sometimes multifaceted need. At present, this is not represented in the programme Theory of Change and we invite the CCS team to consider it as a valid objective of the programme.
- **Building trusted relationships:** some of the support provided by organisations is informal, relationship building. It shares some characteristics with aftercare although the term does not always resonate with delivery organisations. As a result, some organisations are not requesting funds (both within the CCS programme and beyond) for this work. We recommend shifting the discourse from aftercare to ‘building trusted relationships’ in an attempt to support organisations to do this work. Building these trusted relationships is critical to helping identify and respond to identifying need.
- **Consider where on the ‘ownership continuum’ the project wants to be:** An early aspiration of the programme was for local organisations to own the direction of the programme and come forward with workstream ideas. Evidence suggests that the open nature (i.e., a sense of freedom for organisations to design their own projects without a pre-determined set of outcomes) of the workstreams has been challenging to engage with. We invite the team to consider how realistic true ownership of the programme at pilot site level is likely to be and recognise that full co-production may not be possible. Steps towards ownership (such as local organisations calling meetings, offering to lead on workstreams etc.) should still be regarded as a success especially given the organisational pressures due to Covid-19.

It is also recommended that the programme considers how best to:

- Ensure that system pathways allow space for practitioners to build trust with people accessing services.
- Consider how the programme can improve the ability and confidence of organisations to place value on building trusted relationships.
- Consider ways to better engage smaller, voluntary led organisations in the programme.
- Consider the role of schools in the programme and beyond.

Year 1 of the CCS Programme in Norfolk

Key learning

- A balanced mix of access to crisis support, specialist services, referral infrastructure and training and development was funded in Norfolk in Year 1.
- There was evidence of cross-over between different workstreams in Norfolk.
- The workstream case study highlights the role of trust, and wider (non-crisis) related provision in being important to develop relationships and provide crisis support. The workstream took a proactive approach to outreach.
- A wide range of outcomes were seen, linked both to the response to Covid-19, and often beyond the initial outcomes identified for the CCS Theory of Change.

CCS activity in Norfolk

Summary of funded workstreams in Norfolk

Four workstreams have been funded by the CCS programme in Norfolk, using a mixture of core CCS funding and Covid-19 response funding levered-in through funders such as the Martin Lewis Foundation. Two of the four workstreams are a direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Below we describe each of the workstreams, and include in sub-bullets the primary target outcome theme.

Figure 1: Workstream description and primary target outcome theme

Workstream	Description	Primary target outcome theme
Norwich Integration Partnership (NIP)	Norwich Integration Partnership (NIP) is a pre-existing partnership of three organisations (Bridge Plus, New Routes Integration & English+) supporting individuals with NRPF, migrants and asylum-seekers. With an expected reach of 250 clients CCS funding was provided to support a collaborative response to Covid-19. The funding helped proactively and collaboratively identify and support vulnerable clients through information sharing, supermarket vouchers, IT top-ups and other support.	Improved access to crisis support
Norfolk Community Law Service (NCLS)	This workstream responded to increased demand on family solicitor services during the pandemic. Funding is helping NCLS increase their capacity to expand their offer to clients, providing an additional 6.5hrs p/week for an initial period of 10 months. Funding is expected to help the service to reach 140 clients in need of legal advice and support.	Improved access to crisis support Addressing underlying need
Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN)	This workstream was already agreed before lockdown, but was slightly delayed as NCAN sought to respond to the crisis. The workstream will help NCAN to further develop the online referral system; allow closer monitoring of uptake; promoting the system to new and existing users. This is supported by increased staffing resource.	Improved access to crisis support Addressing underlying need
Grant awareness (NCAB)	Norfolk Citizens Advice Bureau (NCAB) received funding for the development of a database and delivery of training for staff and volunteers across Norfolk, to help address underlying needs and improve access to crisis support	Improved access to crisis support Addressing underlying need

About this paper

In consultation with the TCS team, it was agreed that a useful lens for the Year 1 evaluation would be for Cloud Chamber to conduct workstream case studies in each of the four pilot sites. The questions that workstream case studies aim to answer include:

- What happened in the workstream?
- How did the workstream adapt / respond to Covid-19?
- What have we learned as a result of this workstream?
- What was the impact of the workstream on service users? How many service users were reached?
- What was the impact of the workstream on local systems change?
- How did CCS Programme add value to this area of work?
- To what extent did the workstream contribute to the initial five themes (access, simplified application, underlying need, aftercare, learning)

This paper is based on a case study of the Norwich Integration Partnership Workstream and a survey of participants regarding systems change. Interviews have been completed with six stakeholders including delivery partners involved in the NIP workstream.

The remainder of this paper focuses primarily on learning and reflections from the NIP workstream and highlights key messages from the survey that are relevant across the county.

Systems change survey

Nineteen (19) Norfolk-based partners responded to our systems change survey delivered in summer 2020 - around three quarters were voluntary sector organisations, with the remainder from local authorities.

Over two-thirds noted gaps in crisis support locally. This included general gaps and lack of engagement from some established agencies, but also geographic access issues to mental health provision; with those in towns and cities better able to access support. Notable groups with a lack of support included asylum seekers and refugees. This applied generally to other services, with two stating a 'postcode lottery' in service provision.

- *"Norfolk is such a patchwork of provision, support can be a postcode lottery." (VCS organisation)*

Another theme was respondents noted internet access and digital exclusion to be significant gaps in the provision of crisis support. The lack of face-to-face support was an issue for many, particularly related to services provided during Covid-19.

Respondents noted the importance of having a designated local leader for coordination, or a first point of contact:

- *"It would help to have one organisation recognised as the first line for communication." (VCS organisation)*

Others felt it was important to build on existing shared referral systems in Norfolk, with a number citing NCAN as a good example of a system that perform that role.

- *“Expansion of an open and transparent referral system with consistent feedback on the referees progress.” (VCS organisation)*

Respondents noted structural issues in the VCSE sector that hamper responses to crisis support. This included a lack of capacity to do quality referrals, and follow-up work that might prevent future crises. Another respondent noted the lack of long-term funding for VCSE being one thing that could change.

While slowly changing, respondents reported a lack of strategic involvement or focus on collaboration from public sector partners. Respondents noted that robust and real engagement between sectors was lacking and that better joining up between the voluntary and public sectors would be beneficial. This included better IT systems between public sector providers, more coordination between VCSEs and district councils, and then between districts and the county council. Keeping up to date when new organisations offer services or existing ones change their offer would be beneficial, through a shared directory for example.

Around half of respondents were ‘actively involved’ in the CCS programme, there were also mixed awareness of the objectives of the programme. Most commonly, respondents were fully aware of the objectives of the CCS programme (44%). However, 38% were not fully aware or somewhat aware of the objectives, and 13% were not clear about the objectives of the CCS programme.

The most valuable elements of the programme were an opportunity to build or develop new partnerships (18%) and as an opportunity to discuss and understand needs for people in crisis in the local area (18%).

Respondents most commonly expected to benefit from the CCS programme through improved working with other service providers in their area (9), and improved coordination (6) and sharing of good practice with other pilot sites (6).

About the NIP workstream

Norwich Integration Partnership

Formed in 2015, the Norwich Integration Partnership (NIP) is a collaboration between three organisations - English+, New Routes and The Bridge Plus+. The partnership aims to improve service provision for people from ethnic minority communities, particularly those who are recently settled and dealing with complex issues. Each partner brings a complementary set of skills and expertise, with services offered including:

- Information, advice and advocacy
- Language development and integration activities
- Personalised one-to-one support
- Skills development opportunities

Each of the organisations tend to serve the same client groups, including those with no recourse to public funds, asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants.

Need and rationale

NIP received funding from the CCS programme to support a collaborative response to Covid-19. The funding was used to support staffing, IT infrastructure costs in relation to changing work patterns (WFH), and the provision of direct financial assistance. This support was suggested by partners during a ‘Covid-19 response’ meeting, facilitated by the programme.

The funding aimed to ensure the availability of services to vulnerable clients and provide immediate relief from financial crisis. This was in response to challenges clients face when accessing mainstream support, delays in universal credit payments, digital exclusion, access to free school meals – all accelerating crisis among vulnerable clients. The approach was to focus on an agreed list of ‘vulnerable clients’ shifting provision to a proactive model of support; contacting clients proactively, sharing information between partners and responding quickly to immediate need.

This proactive model of working required more time from existing staff, and the way in which staffing hours were structured across the organisations was piecemeal. For example, staffing within organisations within the partnership tended to be part-time, and reliant on time-limited grant or contract funding, with different working patterns for staff members. Funding from the CCS programme enabled staff to have their hours extended to meet needs emerging from lockdown.

The funding allowed many staff to ‘make up their hours’ reflecting the intensity of support they were now providing – ensuring that staff morale was maintained throughout the lockdown and beyond. The funding also paid for organisational Zoom subscriptions, allowing services to be delivered accessibly online.

A shared database of vulnerable clients was established, building on pre-existing data sharing agreements between the three organisations. This allowed information to be systematically and accurately shared between partners, ensuring no duplication, improved efficiency, and improved experience for clients (who did not have to repeat their circumstances, for example).

Supplementing this way of working, the funding enabled financial crisis to be alleviated directly through provision of supermarket vouchers and utility top ups. In addition, digital inclusion was supported through provision of mobile data top-ups and in some cases (funded from elsewhere) IT equipment.

Activities

For English+, staffing hours were increased, and in addition, sessional tutors were employed to enable English Classes to be run online. The charity relies on retired ex-teachers to provide English lessons, and a combination of shielding and technology literacy meant that there were holes in provision that needed to be quickly filled to meet demand. Existing volunteers were paid to ensure services were maintained for vulnerable clients.

English lessons, while not a direct response to the crisis, were an important mechanism to promote social interaction and tackle isolation. Importantly, they acted as a way of keeping track of vulnerable service users, ensuring that people were coping during the lockdown.

New Routes offered some of their integration activities online, including homework support, families club, one to one support sessions, and mentoring and befriending. This was combined with doorstep visits from staff across the partnership. NIP (notably English+) worked with another charity, The Soul Foundation, to provide food boxes, toys and books for children; all of which were distributed by NIP volunteers and staff. Cleaning products were also distributed as part of the funding, which were important in keeping clients safe.

At The Bridge Plus+, staffing hours were increased among several staff members, and extending one member of staff to full time to ensure continuity of service. Collaborative working with other organisations in the partnership meant that advice and guidance, particularly around benefits, was quickly accessible for vulnerable clients.

The following vouchers were made available to service users as part of the funding:

- Supermarket vouchers

- Mobile data top ups
- Utility vouchers

For some organisations in the partnership, this was the first time they had directly offered financial support to clients.

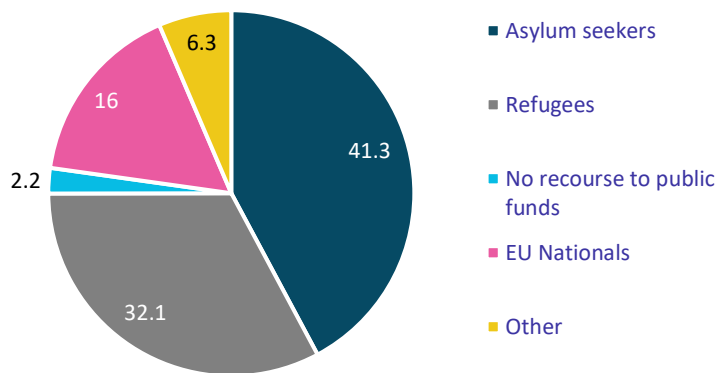
Reach

Partners reported back to us that they simply would not have been able to offer the dedicated response to Covid-19, without the funding from the CCS programme. The funding was timely and pre-dated many of the other (and numerate) offers of emergency funding from other funders. This enabled the organisations to respond quickly to the need they were uncovering. In addition, the networking and collaborative thinking promoted by the CCS programme encouraged a more collaborative approach, than may otherwise have happened.

- *“In January to March we offered 20 hours of student support per week, within the next two months we had increased that to 80 hours.” (NIP Staff member)*

During July 2020, the workstream had engaged with 525 clients across the partnership. Most commonly service users were asylum seekers (41%) or refugees (32%) – see Figure 2. Three quarters of all those engaged received information and advice (392 clients), and around half were engaged in English as a Second Language (ESOL) Classes (281 clients). 78 received mobile phone top-ups, 67 were supported with food and essential items, and 39 with utilities top-ups. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 2: Clients supported by citizenship status (% , n= 525)



Source: NIP Monitoring returns

Figure 3: Clients receiving services

Service	N	% of all clients (n=525)
Information and advice	392	75%
ESOL	281	54%
Other practical support	221	42%
Families club	135	26%
Mobile phone top-ups	78	15%
Food and essential items provision	67	13%

Homework club	60	11%
Utilities top-ups	39	7%
IT equipment and access	22	4%

Source: NIP Monitoring returns

Further monitoring data shows that in the month of July, 165 supermarket vouchers were distributed across 67 clients; an average of 2.5 vouchers per person. 93% of the vouchers benefited families with children.

Outcomes

Continuing services and delivering a proactive service had clear benefits for service users. While we were not able to consult directly with clients, staff reported the following outcomes:

- **Safety net:** for many clients the grant provided a safety net for people at risk of falling into destitution, particularly where there was no recourse to public funds, or a convergence of multiple problems presenting at the same time. This was a result of the close collaboration between partners.
- **Quicker access to benefits and other advice:** the funding helped to secure income in circumstances where jobs were lost (often zero hours contracts), quicker for those in the greatest need. This extended to immigration issues, health issues and also in understanding the rules around the pandemic.
- **Improved mental wellbeing:** regular and proactive contact with NIP helped to directly deal with financial hardship, improving their overall sense of wellbeing. For children, providing books and toys kept them occupied – improving physical and mental wellbeing.
- **Combatting loneliness:** continuation of English lessons, doorstep visits and proactive contacting helped to tackle loneliness and isolation exacerbated by the lockdown. In some cases, the partnership connected clients/families with similar backgrounds to help form social ties.
- **Educational outcomes:** children were enabled to access data to continue their education, where otherwise they would have been excluded because of lack of data or lack of equipment. English+ used their training laptops to support lack of IT among clients. In one month, 68 children engaged in online ESOL classes, homework sessions or other online resources offered by NIP.
- **Prevention of further crisis:** the proactive approach meant that further and potentially more serious financial or personal crises were likely to be averted; this was done through the regularity of contact, high levels of trust developed, and proactiveness and intensity of support.
- **Empowerment:** provision of supermarket vouchers gave service users more choice and autonomy over the food they had access to, compared to food bank provision, for example.

The reach of the partnership was reportedly greater, with increased referrals from other organisations, and re-emergence of ex-service users, or infrequent service users.

The following service user perspective illustrates the impact the workstream has had. It highlights that issues affecting crisis often compound, and that holistic and joined up support is really necessary in dealing with crisis.

Natalie is a single mum living with four children/stepchildren. She is a foreign national who moved to the UK over 5 years ago. She speaks some English but has found it difficult to find time to learn English. Natalie is determined to make a better life for herself and her children/stepchildren. She continued to work part-time until the lockdown; she

has sought advice on accessing childcare in order to work, access welfare benefits to be able to pay bills and look after the children; and she's applied for EU settled status.

Natalie first came into contact with NIP by word of mouth. She was new to Norwich, having previously lived in a more rural area of Norfolk. Natalie was known to The Bridge Plus+ before the Covid-19 outbreak. Unfortunately, the pandemic and the lockdown situation have had a severe impact on her financial situation and the wellbeing of the family:

- Natalie lost her part time job. Despite having told her employer that she was entering the later part of her pregnancy and that she was worried about Covid-19, that she would struggle coming to work if childcare facilities closed, her employment was terminated during lockdown. Her employer had tried to contact her via their HR online system – which she cannot access due to lack of IT and English skills.
- Her stepson's mental health and wellbeing deteriorated as a result of the lockdown as he found it difficult to stay indoors and not have his normal routine. The family lives in overcrowded conditions – the local authority doesn't recognise that Natalie cares for her stepchildren so they consider her housing needs as for a two bed flat. This has meant their living conditions during lockdown were difficult. NIP partners helped N. to seek legal advice from a local partner (NCLS) and as a result, she went through ACAS mediation process. The employer did not respond so we are now helping her to submit an employment tribunal claim. The referral was made via NCAN.
- Language and IT barriers has meant Natalie needed a lot of support from the The Bridge Plus+ in order to access her welfare rights. Delays in benefits payments have meant that supermarket vouchers, mobile and energy top ups, and food parcels, all funded through The Children's Society funding to NIP partners, have made a very significant difference to Natalie's household finances, enabling her to stay afloat while waiting for benefits decisions. English+ also helped to source baby equipment and baby clothes before her baby's due date. English+ and New Routes provided family learning kits and family summer activity packs.

The support NIP has provided has been holistic with so many different issues addressed (housing, welfare benefits, immigration advice, employment legal advice, family support through learning packs, as well as baby donations). The partnership has been able to provide intensive support to the family, thanks to additional hours funded through the programme. The service user provided some feedback on her experience of working with the partnership:

- *"The Bridge Plus+ gives me hope that one day I will be able to understand all these letters myself. The food parcels, the vouchers and the donations that I have received from New Routes and English+ have brought big smiles on my children's faces. I am still worried about what will happen about the job I lost. But at least I am getting good advice on this."*

Local systems outcomes

The main system outcomes were reported at organisational level - within the Norwich Integration Partnership itself. Staff reported greater collaboration as a result of both the grant funding and the programme influence itself:

- *"We came closer together as a team of three organisations, with fewer overlaps in delivery; and much closer working – it really enhanced that." (NIP Staff member)*

Staff reported a better recognition and respect of organisational strengths. There was more efficient effort, and fewer instances of duplication.

- *"Bringing people together has been important; otherwise we risk duplicating as there is no clear pathway for client needs." (NIP Staff member)*

The proactive model of support intersected with other workstreams that formed part of the CCS programme, including:

- **NCAN – Norwich Community Advice Network:** clients were supported using the NCAN referral system, which improved the efficiency and speed of formal referrals and information sharing between The BridgePlus+ and other advice providers from across Norfolk.
- **NCLS – legal advice:** given the increase in demand for specialist advice services such as those provided by NCLS, the pressure on time increased during the pandemic. Staff reported close working with NCLS, often facilitated by the NCAN referral system, with information flowing both before and after a specialist appointment. This improved the quality of support and aftercare for clients.

The BridgePlus+ reported that, partly as a result of involvement with CCS programme, the charity had recently joined the NCAN steering group. The programme had helped to raise the organisation’s profile locally (“*We are now taken more seriously*”), and as a result there is greater representation of asylum seeker, refugee and economic migrant’s needs across advice services in the County.

Interviewees reported greater awareness and interaction with other organisations in the local area

- *“Personally, developed a closer working relationship and knowledge of what other voluntary sector organisations are doing.... the voluntary sector feels robust and people work together really well.” (NIP staff member)*

Workstream learning

- **The importance of consistency:** The VCS can develop trust and help vulnerable clients to ‘open up’ about their issues. English+ were strategic about trust development, trying to ensure consistency of support between their online classes and their doorstep deliveries/visits (i.e. by using the same volunteer).
- **English classes are a way to keep in touch with potentially vulnerable clients:** Collaborative and integrated working means that more general (or seemingly unrelated services to crisis support) such as English lessons can be valuable ways of supporting vulnerable people. The lessons offered by English+ during the lockdown were important ways of proactively safeguarding vulnerable clients from crisis, given the regularity of support and the trust developed by sessional tutors. If a client missed an English class, this was often “an excuse to get in contact” and check if there are any problems. Collaboration with the partnership could then quickly solve any issues emerging.
- **Still a need for in person contact:** The partnership learnt the value of keeping in touch with clients who can’t access technology through face to face contact. Particularly among asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants – language barriers, digital exclusion and lack of social networks mean that face to face contact remains important to addressing need.
- **Value of CCS facilitation:** The CCS networking meetings facilitated contacts to the Soul Foundation (to provide food boxes), and networking taking place via the programme directly informed a joint response and promoted collaborative and joined up working.
- **Systemic challenges remain:** Partners reflected on the underlying challenges in the area, which included principally lack of IT equipment, and digital exclusion such as lack of credit. The raising of awareness of the needs and issues affecting the client group was a valuable function of the programme. This was said to help give a voice to the issues asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants were facing.
 - *“It is great for us to work with a supportive organisation that have that position nationally, and voice that we don’t. CCS are great at raising the profile and campaigning – can’t do it on the same scale.” (NIP Staff member)*

- *“If the programme can carry on advocating on some of these issues that have been raised locally, that is invaluable as an outcome.” (NIP Staff member)*

Other reflections on the programme included:

- Ensuring existing networks are not duplicated or are successfully drawn into a programme.
- The frequency of networking meetings were difficult for smaller VCS organisations to attend and contribute to.
- The ease of application, minimum reporting requirements, and flexibility in how to spend the funding was valuable in meeting client need (both in minimising administration and in meeting needs).