

The Mercers' Company

Homelessness Deep Dive

Final report

Part 2: Findings Report - *What We Know Now*

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Part 2 - Findings Report: *What We Know Now*

Analysis following an evaluation of Mercers' homelessness projects

Foreword to Part 2

This stand-alone report presents the findings of the deep-dive evaluation of Homelessness projects awarded grants by Mercers' Church and Communities programme (funded by Mercers' Charitable Foundation and the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington) carried out by a team of independent research and evaluation consultants in 2020. It focuses primarily on data gathered through interviews with project leads, staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. Here, you will find sections on projects':

- Values, faith, approaches and delivery models
- Challenges, including their responses to COVID-19;
- Outcomes and impact – the most substantial part of this report;
- Work with Mercers'; and
- Learning and the future.

Each section includes conclusions, which are also drawn together in Part 3, along with our recommendations.

The companion report, '**Part 1: Understanding the Landscape: what we need to know about evaluating Mercers' homelessness projects**' can be read separately in order to understand more about the evidence base, the approach taken and the projects funded as part of the evaluation.

Both reports should be read in conjunction with our report '**Part 3: Summary Conclusions and Recommendations**'.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the projects for their commitment and enthusiasm in being part of the evaluation. A special thank you to those projects who participated in the case studies;

- The Living Room (Great Yarmouth, Norfolk)
- The Nehemiah Project (South London)
- Oasis Community Housing (Gateshead and area)
- Shelter From the Storm (London, Islington)

"If it wasn't for Nehemiah I don't know whether I'd be alive or dead or still in prison, who knows?... Nehemiah has been able to support me in that behaviour change, so I've learnt about myself and how to change my behaviour and it's given me confidence to want to achieve, I want to take on new challenges... that will help me grow and re-integrate into community" **Beneficiary**

1 Values, faith, approaches and delivery models

Key finding: Most projects had strong and similar values and approaches, with a range of delivery models.

1.1 Values that underpin the organisations and the projects

The 'core values' cutting across all of the projects are **social values**, which closely **align to a Christian ethos**. Common values which were cited as underpinning the organisations included; compassion, trust, respect, acceptance, generosity and hope.

In total, 14 of the 21 funded projects were delivered by faith-based organisations. Although faith was important to them, all were clear to state that beneficiaries, staff and volunteers didn't have to be Christian or any other faith to be involved. There was a real sense of **'everyone is accepted'** and all were keen to make beneficiaries feel welcome and included. Nonetheless, across the faith-based

projects it was noted that a proportion of beneficiaries accessing projects asked to worship and / or attended church services.

"Underlying what we do is the desire and commitment to treat everyone fairly... and to give them the opportunity that they need and deserve" ... C4WS, Project Lead

"We are a Christian homelessness charity – all our work is value-based and flows from Christian values. This influences what we do but doesn't restrict it". Oasis, Project Lead

Several project leads and workers referred to their role in providing for 'people's rights' in terms of having their basic needs (for warmth, shelter, food, love and autonomy) met. One project working with women highlighted the need to **"challenge injustice"** and promote the rights of the women they work with.

1.2 Approaches taken by the projects: Strengths and Features

Project leads were asked about the approaches they had taken and what it was about these that strengthened, enhanced or added value to their projects, the people within them and / or the wider community.

Key features and strengths of approaches taken by projects were:

- Person centred, holistic and flexible
- Inclusive, welcoming and open - valuing the beneficiary¹ and building relationships
- Working in partnership with other agencies
- Importance of place (location)
- The skills, approach and commitment of staff and volunteer teams
- Ability to provide specialist advice and support

¹ Projects used a range of terms when referring to the people they worked with including; Residents, Guests, Servicer User etc... For consistency we have used the term beneficiary throughout in our commentary, though we recognise it may not be the most appropriate term in all instances.

On the whole projects adopted a **person centred, holistic and flexible approach** - with the individual at the heart of everything they do, tailoring their offer to meet their needs and supporting them in personalised ways. This approach highlighted the **ability of projects to work flexibly** to meet the needs of individuals, many of whom had multiple complex needs, sometimes presenting with challenging, unpredictable behaviours which required the ability to adapt to situations as necessary.

"it's that recognition that everyone can make bad decisions, but they don't define you. One of our key strengths is being happy to be part of people's 'blips'."
Hope4Barking and Dagenham, Project Lead.

Projects **viewed the beneficiary as an individual** with their own story and related 'assets' (e.g. experiences, skills, talents) and challenges, This personalised approach allowed projects to get to know individuals and the range of issues they are facing and allowed for relationships and trust to be built. The basic premise behind most projects was that enabling people to feel valued, supported, safe and loved meant that projects could help them to make good decisions.

Taking a **holistic approach** (i.e. seeing the person as a whole and not dealing with issues in silo) and offering

"We deal with everything, the whole spectrum, and that enables us to really empower individuals to put in place the pieces that they need to move into sustainable accommodation" C4WS Homeless Project, Project Lead

a range of related support and services was seen to be a strength by a number of projects. Whilst people's initial reasons for contact or referral may be issue specific (e.g. drugs, mental health), projects worked to identify underlying causes to avoid a repeat cycle and to move them into a better position or place, thereby supporting sustainable change for individuals.

The **inclusive welcome and open approach, which values, respects and welcomes anyone** - especially those who may have been rejected by other services, was a key feature and strength. Related to this was the **diversity of reach** with many projects engaging a range of vulnerable people (e.g. older people, people with mental health issues and addictions, families living in poverty) as well as people who were homeless or rough sleepers. Anecdotal feedback from beneficiaries highlighted that, through contact with the projects, they felt 'heard' and 'seen' and that, 'they mattered', where they had previously felt invisible.

This value and respect for beneficiaries is fundamental in the **building of positive and trusting relationships with and between staff, volunteers and beneficiaries** and underscores much of the approach taken by projects. Some beneficiaries indicated they felt part of a 'family' or a 'community' through engagement in the projects. This community element was seen by some as 'therapy' for a whole range of issues with some beneficiaries staying connected after their immediate need for support has passed.

"When I first started working here I could never tell who was a resident and who was working here, there was always a bit of a blur and I think that's one of the strengths of the organisation really"
Anchor House Caritas, Project Lead.

As an example of the **value placed on those with lived experiences**, many projects highlighted the importance of **collaboration and co-production** – identifying appropriate ways for them to be involved in reviewing and delivering projects. One project had involved all staff and volunteers in contributing to the development of the service and there were several examples of former clients coming back to volunteer or securing paid

employment within the organisations. As well as being a positive outcome for the individual, having volunteers and staff with 'lived experience', who were able to empathise and engage effectively with the clients was seen as a real asset to the projects. Some projects, however, pointed out the challenges as well as the importance of finding ways of collaborating meaningfully with their clients.

Partnerships and connections with other agencies had been created both formally, as part of the project delivery, and informally as part of a wider network. Some projects saw partnership working as central to their offer to beneficiaries in terms of meeting practical needs (e.g. donations of food and clothes from supermarkets, a library offering a warm place to sit on cold days) and linking people up with other agencies who could offer support. Being part of a bigger network had also enabled sharing of resources, skills and knowledge allowing projects to enhance their offer or provide something unique. For example, a partnership with a charity that offers drug and alcohol support led to the provision of related training for staff and volunteers in one project.

"I think it's exciting because of the partnership between us 'Impact Hub' who bring the entrepreneurial experience and our networks and Crisis' expertise in homelessness". Impact Hub, Project Lead

'Place', in terms of location, was very important to some projects. Many talked about homelessness in

"People who come to Brigade to eat, do so knowing they are eating with purpose., every meal that's sold, every drink that's sold the money is going back into the programmes, the community in general are very supportive". Beyond Food Foundation. Project Lead

their local context and the desire to 'make a difference locally'. Having the support and backing of the local area and community was essential for many to be able to do this. Homelessness often carries negative associations (e.g. fear of living near a homeless shelters, fear of increased risk of crime) and several projects demonstrated how they worked hard to engage the community, to raise the profile of the projects in a positive light. This also meant they had generated local community support in various ways e.g. donations of money, food and clothes, local volunteers.

The skills, dedication, commitment and approach of the staff and volunteers was cited as a key strength by a number of projects. Having staff with different skills means that projects are able to meet the needs of clients with varying issues and challenges. Having a small staff team was also seen as a strength in one project meaning they could flex and meet need very appropriately.

"So, if someone who is craving alcohol, we have staff who have experience of dealing with this". Nehemiah, Project Lead

"We are very niche ...and have lots of experience, expertise, knowledge and skills in dealing with it. We're the only organisation that focuses on section 17 support purely...for those who are excluded from mainstream welfare or are experiencing destitution or homelessness - it can be a bit of a lifeline..." Project 17. Project Lead

A related strength of some projects was their **expertise and provision of (or access to) specialist advice and support** on issues affecting their clients e.g. housing, welfare, immigration issues. For example, one project offered a trauma-informed, counselling service for people with complex traumatic experiences (*Shelter from the Storm*). Another offered a 'family support service' for homeless men and supported them to re-connect with their families who

they may not have seen for years. Two projects offered specific specialist advice and support to people with no recourse to public funds.

1.3 Delivery models

Each project had developed a delivery model which reflected its values and approaches. The Mercers' funded projects often sat within a broader range of services, and projects themselves sometimes found it difficult to disentangle which parts Mercers' were funding. The table below broadly maps the services offered by the different projects. Those most common services to be provided by projects, were advice and support around 'Rights' (such as welfare, housing and legal advice), along with help to develop independence and personal skills, followed by signposting/referrals and 1:1 case work.

Table 1: Matrix - project delivery

Organisation name / project title	Emergency Accommodation	Short term / temporary housing	Supported housing	Meals	1:1 case work	Rights - welfare, housing and legal	Employment and Skills	Health and well-being support	Building connections - social and family	Other support e.g. Signposting / referrals	Independence & Personal Development	Indirect support
South Tyneside Churches KEY Project												
Hope into Action												
Upper Room												
Impact Hub Kings Cross Ltd												
The Cinnamon Network												
999 Club and Lady Florence Trust												
Manna Society												
Nehemiah Project												
Passage												
The Living Room Great Yarmouth												
Beyond Food Foundation												
Project 17												
Open DOOR												
C4WS Homeless Project												
Shelter From The Storm		*										
Oasis Community												
Caritas - Anchor House												
700 Club												
King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter												
Hope4barkingdagenham												
The Great Yarmouth Pathway												

*Up to 12 weeks during lockdown

Limitations: Projects were not asked explicitly for this information, so some assumptions have been made based on the data available. There may therefore be some errors and omissions. We also acknowledge that some organisations maybe offering a wider range of activities than reflected above but we have tried to reflect the specific activities funded under this grants programme.

1.4 Conclusions

There were a number of common core values widely held by and underpinning projects, regardless of whether they were delivered by faith based or non-faith organisations.

The approaches taken by these projects are already known to be effective and appropriate in addressing the needs of homeless people. Person-centred, inclusive and holistic approaches were seen as essential to be able to meet the needs of individuals accessing the services. Building solid meaningful relationships within the projects and the wider communities through partnerships and collaboration were also deemed key success factors. The projects found different ways of finding the appropriate staff and volunteers to be able to meet the needs of beneficiaries and deliver in effective ways, even in this exceptional year.

Delivery models were shaped by projects' values, faith and approaches, but also by their clients' needs and their locality.

2. Challenges, including responses to COVID-19

Key finding: COVID-19 was identified as the most significant challenge by many projects. Other challenges included: recruiting and maintaining volunteers; sourcing funding; dealing with the complex and multiple needs of this particular client group.

2.1 Effects of COVID-19

The **effects of COVID-19 have been significant** on all the funded organisations. It has proved to be a very challenging time and affected the delivery of all projects in differing ways according to when the funding was awarded, their service, provision or offer.

All of the projects have, to some degree, had to **change the way in which they work** to ensure the safety of their staff and beneficiaries. Most have **adopted a more remote style** of working and have **increased their reliance on technology** for virtual contact. For some projects remote working has been successful and will be continued. Project 17 explained how it's reduced some of the barriers to people engaging in their services (e.g. travel costs, childcare) meaning they can reach a wider range of people.

"People who had been in a subculture of 'getting by' maybe doing cash in hand work...were forced out...we have seen an increase in people who are very chaotic and have been hidden from view, which has really taken its toll... Open Door, Project Lead

Several projects have seen their project **costs rise** due to requirements for increased cleaning and PPE. Others have had reduced resources due to staff and volunteers being unwell or having to self-isolate or be shielding. Additional financial pressures stemmed from missing out on fundraising opportunities, as many events were cancelled. Whilst access to resources has reduced for some, demand for some services has increased - including from those who were previously "hidden homeless" (e.g. often sofa surfing) which has also put extra pressure on the projects.

"Many things in the local community that clients might connect with are closed at the moment". The Passage, project Lead

The **related negative effects of COVID-19** on beneficiaries was highlighted by many. For some it meant they could not access the same level of intensive support projects would normally provide and others were unable to access the services at all e.g. night shelter provision. It was highlighted

that, during lockdown, many homeless people have experienced movement across different accommodation and locations which has also been unsettling, affecting their mental health and increasing their exposure to risks and isolation.

The **availability of volunteers** has been especially affected by COVID-19, both through lockdown restrictions and because many volunteers are older and therefore more likely to be shielding.

In addition, the changing guidance from government around COVID 19 was considered unclear by some, causing frustration and uncertainty about their future delivery model.

Below are some examples, highlighting how projects have been affected by and responded to the pandemic.

The 999 club - Emergency accommodation (night shelter) & day centre with wrap around support (London) Needs have been changing weekly and they have had to adapt and be flexible in responding to the varying needs of the project, staff, beneficiaries and their families. They had to get staff working remotely at the outset. The night shelter had to close so the immediate priority was to ensure that everyone was settled somewhere safe. They did this through working closely with a partner organisation and have continued provided a range of support via agencies using different channels. Staff kept regular contact with the beneficiaries by phone to ensure there was continued contact and connection to minimise loneliness. Some people in temporary accommodation had no access to funding so the grant from Mercers' Charitable Foundation helped to provide food vouchers to people quickly, ***"food is a basic need and so a key area of priority"***. Although there have been challenges, the 999 Club are pleased with how they have adapted. ***"Where there are barriers and challenges we have been working to ensure there is a positive resolution"***

Beyond Food Foundation : Cookery apprenticeship scheme, with support & mentoring programme for those that have previously been homeless (London)

COVID has been a massive challenge, working with vulnerable people is hard anyway, but when they are locked down and unable to have face to face contact that creates a greater issue. The founder worked very creatively to find alternative ways to continue the programme and keep working with the apprentices, ***"He immediately set about creating food parcels and doing virtual cooking lessons so the cohort continued as they were and the food was delivered to their doors"***. In addition, this meant the apprentices had regular meals for themselves and their families which was essential. Although they have had huge challenges, they are resilient and have only lost 2 apprentices along the way but they are still in touch with them and supporting them.

700 Club - The Lodge 'Supported B&B style accommodation for the homeless' (North East)

Prior to COVID a key challenge was not knowing who was coming through the door – but now it's ***"not knowing what people are bringing through the door"***. This has resulted in a huge amount of preventative work and costs associated with that to protect the residents and staff e.g. PPE, temperature scanning, social distancing measures. During COVID the numbers accessing the Lodge has increased and they expect this pattern will continue. Flexibility meant that the 700 Club could re-direct some of their Mercers' Charitable Foundation grant to use on these additional costs.

Great Yarmouth Pathway – Community Café, serving hot meals to homeless and vulnerable people (Norfolk)

Since March, due to COVID, people have been unable to come into the building. Take away hot meals, along with a sandwich and snack so they can eat for the whole day, have been provided. Volunteers still try to engage people and have a chat at the door, but there are much fewer opportunities to grow relationships and in bad weather people are reluctant to stay for that social aspect. ***"Quite a few people are asking when they can come back inside. That's what they want, they miss having people around them and that sense of community"***. Costs have also increased as a result of having to buy the consumables for takeaways and food donations have also reduced, due to less surplus being available. The service is reliant on volunteers, many of whom are in the older or vulnerable (COVID) category, so this has had an impact on delivery. As the takeaway service requires fewer volunteers, they have been able to keep operating and continue to feed around 70 people per session.

2.2 Other key challenges faced by projects

In addition to the issues related to COVID-19, projects have also experienced other challenges which included; **recruiting and maintaining volunteers; sourcing funding; responding to complex and multiple needs** of some beneficiaries group (e.g. people with addictions, mental health issues). One project also highlighted Brexit may have a big impact on them, since many of the clients they work with are Eastern European.

2.3 Conclusions

This has been an exceptionally challenging year for most projects. COVID-19 has significantly affected all the projects in varying ways, with delivery and financial implications. In a few cases, it allowed opportunities for projects to work in new, innovative and flexible ways with several stating their greatest success during the funding period have been their resilience and ability to adapt and continue to deliver and meet some of the needs of the beneficiaries they serve; however, for most, it took considerable energy and attention.

Going forward, it is possible that some changes introduced in response to COVID-19 may become permanent, including perhaps some positive changes (such as remote working and virtual contact), but it is too soon to say this for certain. On the other hand, the literature review and the interviews with project leads both suggest that the number of people at risk of becoming homeless will continue to rise (especially when the furlough scheme ends) and several projects are already witnessing this. Therefore, it is likely there will be additional pressures placed on these services in the coming months and years.

3 Outcomes & Impact

3.1 Overview

All projects agreed specific outcomes with Mercers' Grant Programme Managers, which were summarised in individual project Outcomes Frameworks. 'Outcomes' are usually defined as impacts, benefits or changes that result from project activities. 79 different intended outcomes were specified across the 21 projects (mean number 3.76).

An initial breakdown of the agreed project outcomes showed that almost all (74/79; 94%) were intended to have a positive impact directly on homeless people. A small number (5/79; 6%) were intended to impact indirectly, for example through training staff or affecting the wider housing and homelessness system. Interestingly, relatively few projects had intended outcomes relating to the most obvious aspects of homelessness support (i.e. crisis help and housing) which may be because other funding is more easily available for these forms of support than for services and activities with 'softer' outcomes. This initial breakdown is shown in **table 2** below.

Table 2: Initial breakdown of impacts

Impacts on	No. of outcomes (N)
Direct - Crisis Needs	5
Direct - Housing Needs	8
Other Direct Needs	61
Indirect only	5
All	79

For many projects there is, of course, the very tangible outcome of saving lives. However, whilst many projects talked about this, none had tried to measure it. We have therefore excluded 'saving lives' from this analysis, while recognising it is of paramount importance.

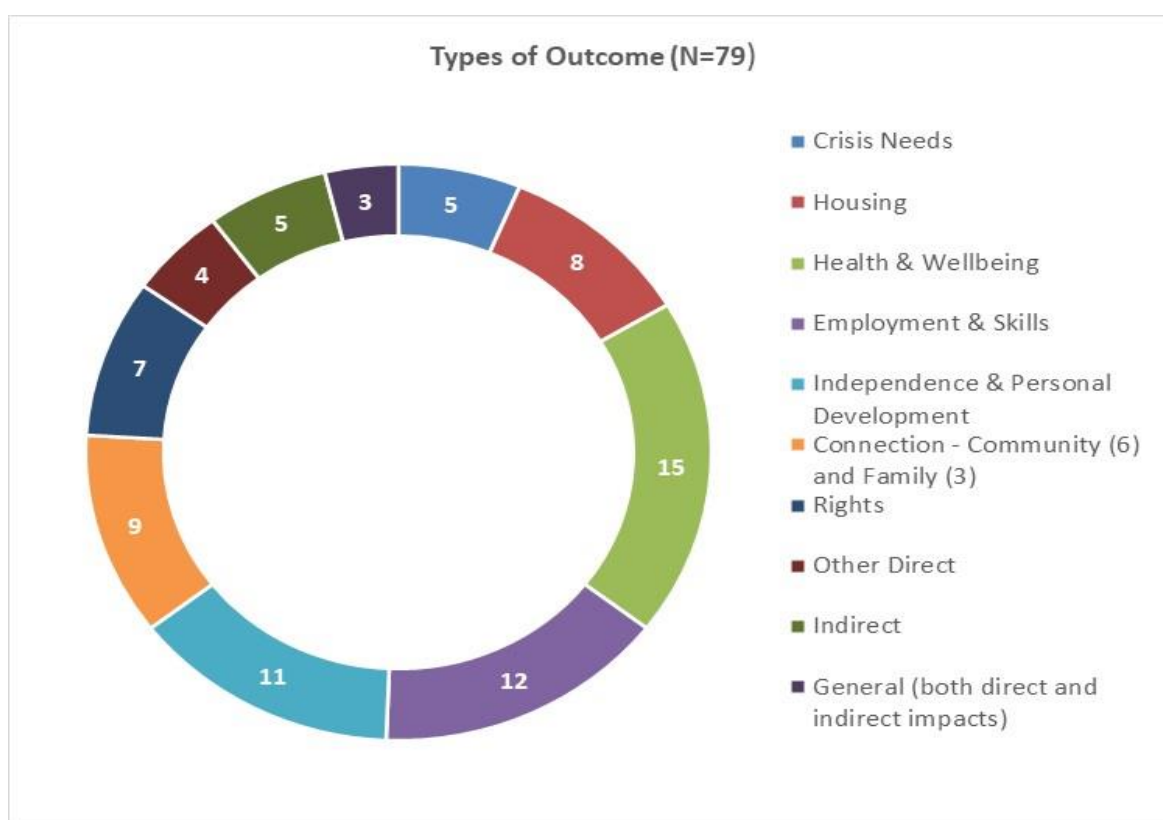
"One lady said, 'if it wasn't for the night shelter, she'd be dead on the street'"
King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter

3.2 Understanding different types of outcomes

A more detailed categorisation of the intended outcomes enables us to understand them better and discuss them more easily. We therefore developed a typology informed by the literature review. (But see also our notes on the methodology, assumptions and limitations of this typology in the footnote².)

The projects aimed to have a wide range of positive impacts, including on homeless people's health and wellbeing (15/79; 19%); employment and skills (12; 15%); independence and personal development (11; 14%); connections with community and family (9; 11%); and welfare and legal rights (7; 9%). **Figure 1** below shows the breakdown of types of outcome, and **table 3** describes each category and gives illustrative examples.

Figure 1: Types of outcome



² We derived this typology in the following way: (1) Listed all project outcomes; (2) Sorted first according to whether or not the impacts directly benefited homeless people; (3) Further sorted outcomes with direct impacts according to whether they were related to crisis needs, housing needs, or other needs; (4) Further sorted those outcomes related to 'other needs' according to themes, informed by the literature review – i.e. starting with health and wellbeing, then known risk and protective factors including poverty, employment and social connection; (5) Reviewed and refined all categories so that they were mutually exclusive; (6) Finally, re-sorted project outcomes into the categories and created an 'other' category for those few that did not fit the typology. Further, note that we made some assumptions in order to be able to categorise outcomes: (a) where intended outcomes were expressed as outputs, we inferred a related outcome; and (b) where a stated outcome seemed to include more than one possible impact, we categorised it according to what appeared to be its primary or main impact (see footnote 2). Two researchers separately reviewed the final typology and categorisation, but the assumptions we made mean that other reviewers may disagree on how some outcomes were sorted. The aim of this categorisation was to be able to describe and discuss a very varied set of agreed outcomes in a useful way, which has been achieved despite the limitations of the methodology.

Table 3: Outcome types, descriptions, examples and numbers (N)

Outcome Type	Description (outcomes relating to)	Example	N
Crisis Needs	Being fed; emergency accommodation	<i>Saving lives during the winter by offering a safe and warm place to stay</i>	5
Housing	Post-crisis accommodation; maintaining tenancies; housing support	<i>Guests moving from the shelter into permanent housing</i>	8
Health & Wellbeing	Supported or improved physical health, mental health and general wellbeing; reduction in substance misuse	<i>Improved physical health & mental wellbeing for homeless and vulnerably housed beneficiaries</i>	15
Employment & Skills	Improved work-related skills; participating in training; obtaining employment	<i>Guests able to continue in or find employment</i>	12
Independence & Personal Development	Gaining confidence; gaining life skills; increased motivation; moving towards independent living;	<i>Individuals will have made the first steps towards addressing their problems and move tentatively towards independence</i>	11
Connection - Community (6) and Family (3)	Building community connections; reconnecting with family	<i>More homeless people experience positive social relationships</i>	9
Rights	Benefits claimed; understanding own welfare rights; legal and immigration rights advanced	<i>Increased financial security as entitlements are maximised</i>	7
Other Direct	Outcomes with direct impacts on homeless people that do not fit other categories	<i>More homeless people connected to agencies who can help</i>	4
Indirect	Staff and volunteer training; leaderships development; networking; system changes	<i>Project embedded in homelessness pathway</i>	5
General (both direct and indirect impacts)	General aims; wider impacts	<i>Reduction in the number of people who are homeless and in housing crisis</i>	3
Total			79

3.3 Evaluating progress towards agreed outcomes

Evaluating projects' progress towards achieving their agreed outcomes was not straightforward. In most cases, it was not possible to say unambiguously whether or not these outcomes were met, for some complex but identifiable reasons, including the following;

- All projects were still underway, so outcomes were only partially met;
- Some projects (N=5) had only recently started, so it was too soon to judge;
- Most projects agreed at least some outcomes which were 'soft' and difficult to evidence – for example increased wellbeing or motivation;
- All projects have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and many have made significant changes to the way they operate, which means that impact may be delayed and/or outcomes may be delivered in unexpected ways;
- Some projects were small community-based projects and limited in terms of having the resource, skills and knowledge to be able to evidence outcomes;
- Several projects reported issues with collecting data and measuring outcomes;
- In some cases, outcomes were not well-expressed and described outputs that were being delivered rather than impacts that were achieved.

Our analysis takes account of the issues and limitations of the data, and we only present findings and conclusions which are nevertheless robust.

We looked at different measures that might help us understand progress in different ways, i.e.: whether Mercers' Grants Programme Managers were satisfied with progress; whether projects were happy with their own progress; whether agreed outcomes were met; and impressions from reviewing interview data. However, the picture was incomplete by all measures – see **tables 4 A-C**. This is significant, because the issues affect a majority of projects and therefore suggest some general conclusions about evidencing the outcomes and impact of the programme as a whole, which are discussed below in 3.5.

It is notable that most projects reported that their outcomes were only partially met, usually because they are still in progress and/or because of effects from the Covid-19 epidemic; no projects said they had achieved all their outcomes. Inevitably therefore, this evaluation only gives a partial and interim picture of the impact of the funding programme as a whole.

Tables 4 A-C: Measures of progress towards outcomes

A. Grant management measures	
Total number of projects with agreed outcomes	21
No. of projects submitting a satisfactory progress report within past 6 months*	12

*All projects submit annual reports – but projects were at different stages of their grant funding

B. Projects' self-reports on outcomes	All met	Partially met	Too soon/ Can't say	None met
N=	0	16	5	0

C. Projects' overall satisfaction with own progress	Satisfied	Uncertain*/ Can't say	Concerned
N=	9	11	1

*Including instances where project leads did not take a view, and where the interview data is incomplete.

D. Impressions from interview data	
<p>Key issues: Significant COVID impacts (11); Needing to change planned work significantly; Data collection challenges with this particular user group; Challenges with capturing 'soft' outcomes.</p>	<p>Key quotations: <i>"So in terms of hitting any targets I have no doubt we will hit the targets, but just been different - the work has gone on and the staff have been brilliant, they stayed working throughout". 700 Club</i> <i>"We will have to revise our outcomes for all of our funders". 999 Club</i></p>

3.4 Achieving unplanned outcomes

15 projects told us about 26 unplanned and/or unanticipated outcomes, achieved in addition to their agreed outcomes. (The list is not necessarily exhaustive: 6 projects did not report unplanned outcomes, but may nevertheless have had some, and some projects may not have reported all their unplanned outcomes). Broadly speaking, the unplanned outcomes they reported were:

- Direct (impacting homeless people) or indirect (relating to staff or system changes); and
- Similar to outcomes that other projects had planned for or uniquely different.

Table 5 shows a full, sorted list of unplanned outcomes. As expected, more were direct (19/26; 73%) than indirect, and more were similar to other projects' planned outcomes (18/26; 69%) than unique.

All unplanned outcomes, of course, provide additional value for the programme as a whole. Both similar and unique outcomes are valuable for different reasons:

- Similar outcomes – which show that different projects achieved similar changes for homeless people – suggest that the approaches and outcomes agreed between projects and Mercers' Grants Programme Managers were appropriate and effective;
- Unique outcomes suggest that some projects are achieving groundbreaking change. Possible to say more about this (it may follow so just noting this as I read through the report)

Table 5: Unplanned outcomes from 15 projects

<p>Direct, Similar (12) Additional support to rough sleepers not previously in contact; Homeless people received additional housing rights advice; People previously experiencing ‘hidden homelessness’ identified and now receiving support; Family relationships rebuilt; Stronger social connections built; Guests becoming volunteers; Some people moved into sustainable accommodation; Some people moved into employment; Some people supported through asylum process; Clients enhancing skills through volunteering in local community; Clients enhancing skills through volunteering locally; Enhanced range of individual outcomes for guests due to additional support new worker provides.</p>	<p>Direct, Unique (7) Secured additional support including £5k grants for homeless people becoming entrepreneurs; Opened new rough sleepers assessment centre; Homeless people more connected by new mobile phones; Prevented children from needing to be taken into local authority care; Secured free school meals and nursery places for new client group previously not entitled; 60-100 meals produced for local people during lockdown; Local people from neighbourhood became volunteers in the shelter.</p>
<p>Indirect, Similar (6) New partnership with other provider; Improved authority partnership working; Successful new partnerships; New accommodation secured; New volunteer peer-to-peer support intended to improve quality and experience; New successful local partnerships.</p>	<p>Indirect, Unique (1) Developed successful franchising model and opened new accommodation;</p>

3.5 Projects’ self-evaluation of impacts and outcomes

Project leads gave us their own views on the strengths, achievements and value of their projects. These are especially valuable because, although they may not be independent, they have the best understanding of their own work.

The successes that projects reported related to the following five themes:

- A. Responses to COVID-19
- B. Providing for essential needs (i.e. a bed and food) and the reach of provision
- C. Enabling people making positive choices and taking a different path
- D. Helping with asylum processes and immigration issues.
- E. Successes related to organisational development

Around a quarter of projects cited **successes related to their response to COVID-19** (as highlighted in section 2). For some this was just about being able to ‘keep going’ during this challenging time and being able to maintain contact and connection with clients. Five projects saw their success related to the provision of essential needs for the people they served, and the reach of that provision both in terms of numbers and range of people supported. A number of projects saw their success related to **enabling people to move forward in their lives**, creating new goals, making positive choices and taking a different path. Two projects provide specific **support to refugees and asylum seekers** and saw key success related to this area of need e.g. the number of clients accessing the section 17 support. Five projects cited successes related to the **development of their project or organisation** e.g. expansion of provision (e.g. housing) to meet the needs of more people, recruitment of new staff and the decision to set up as an independent charity.

It is notable that projects did not tend to describe exceptional or unexpected outcomes as their greatest successes. Rather, they appear to feel most pride in **being able to carry out their ‘core business’** well under very difficult circumstances.

3.6 Further observations on value

The interview data provides evidence that these projects’ outcomes are also valued and valuable in the following ways:

Valued by beneficiaries: Most of the projects work with people who are in crisis, and many work with individuals who have been forced by circumstances rather than chosen to use their services, so that the usual engagement and customer feedback techniques are not appropriate or effective. However, in some cases, people showed that they valued services, when they: returned as volunteers; donated items e.g. sleeping bags they no longer needed; recommended services to other homeless people; joined our interviews to give positive feedback.

“They pick themselves up and then they become part of the whole of society. Often people look upon the homeless as being outside in society - but they become a value in society again. We should be looking at their potential, not as them as a liability” C4S Homeless Project, Project Lead

Social value – tackling exclusion and strengthening connections: The projects that build longer-term relationships with their beneficiaries appear to play a significant role in bringing very marginalised homeless people back into society.

“The men are encouraged to go out and volunteer in the community in other rehabs, charity shops etc.... Most of the men are from the local area or not too far away. So, it’s good for them to be out there and giving something back in their community”. Nehemiah, Project Lead

Social value – wider benefits: Project leads reported that some beneficiaries changed their behaviour in ways that benefit society more widely, for example: reducing drug and alcohol use; reducing crime/offending behaviour; rebuilding relationships within families, including with children.

Volunteering value or ‘give back’: Notably, some volunteers were former beneficiaries who got involved

specifically because they wanted to be able to help people as they themselves had been helped before. There were also examples of project beneficiaries volunteering in the wider community.

"There is a need to be fulfilled" The Living Room, Volunteer

Value to volunteers: The volunteers we interviewed also clearly benefit personally from their involvement in these projects.

Value-for-money: There were many examples of ways in which projects potentially saved money, particularly by reducing the need for other more expensive services and support such as prison or further

acute/crisis care. Many projects noted that their users had 'multiple and complex' or 'chaotic' needs, so that the savings can be significant. We are not able to quantify these (cost information is not available) but examples include:

"[If families remain in unsettled accommodation] those people might suffer horrible hardship...and children who are in those families will lead unsettled lifestyles, etc...so there would be longer term costs to society. Ultimately children may be taken into care, which is very costly". Project 17, Project Lead

- Early intervention with drug users prevents a wide range of further potential costs;
- Working collaboratively helps avoid duplication of services and so saves costs;
- Providing access to primary and preventative health care (e.g. diabetes nurse, dentist) reduces the need for more expensive secondary or acute or crisis care, e.g. hospital visits.

- Preventing family breakdown over 2-3 years leads to savings for local authority children's services:

3.7 The power of 'story' and narratives of change

Projects with social value often demonstrate their outcomes and impacts through case studies, storyboards and other narrative descriptions. These are popular with almost all stakeholders, and are powerful and useful ways to 'tell the story' of the way a project has made a difference to people's lives. We have produced case studies (see separate documents) to 'tell the story' of 4 individual projects, plus and a short film that describes the programme as a whole.

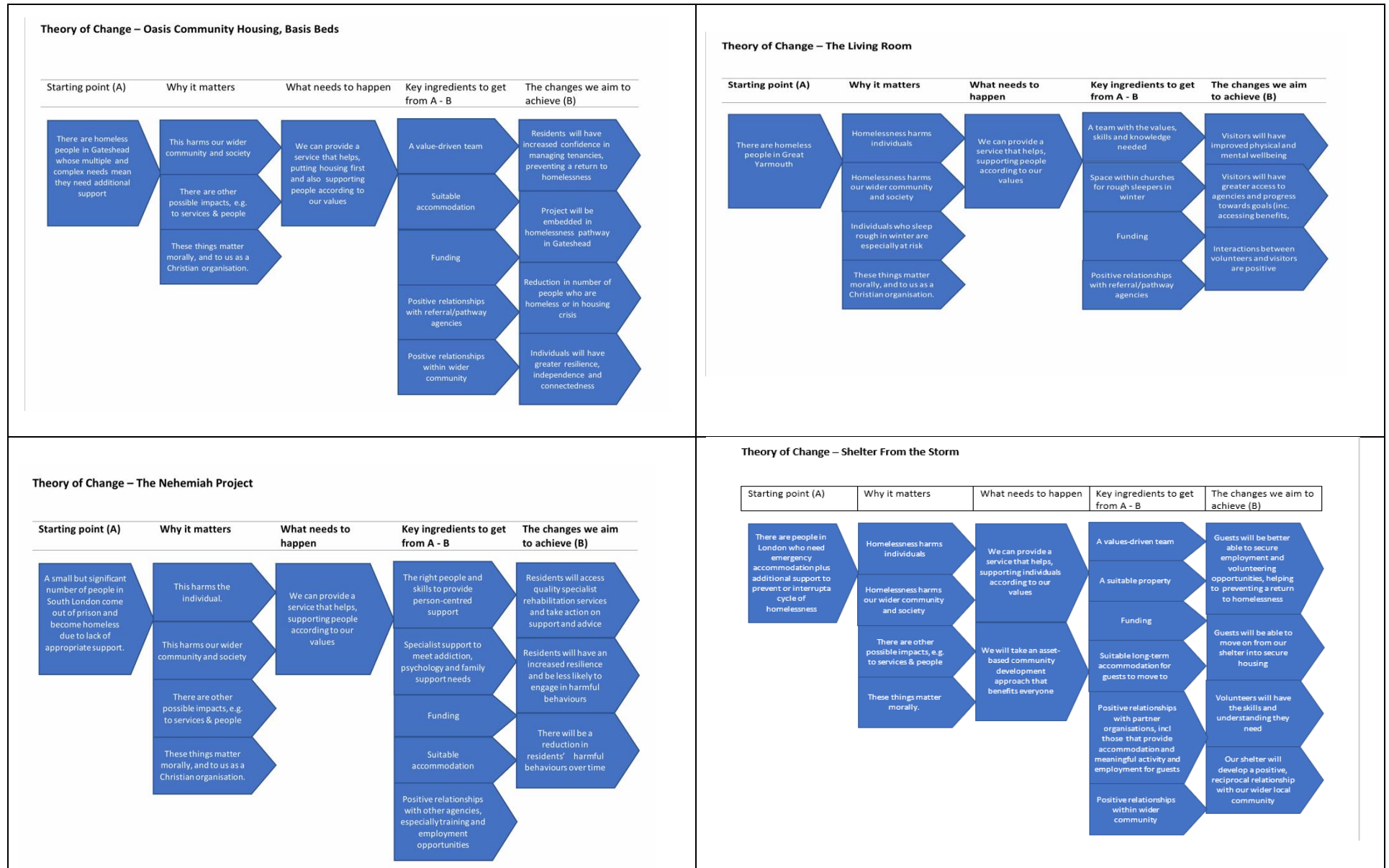
'Theories of change' (TOC) are another useful way of 'telling the story' of projects, and particularly, they enable us to (a) focus attention on the difference projects make to people's lives and the changes they are trying to bring about; (b) consider very different projects side by side; and (c) take account of the values, approaches and assumptions that underlie work of social benefit, but that are often otherwise invisible. TOCs ask key questions that help a project's decision-makers and managers to think systematically about change:

- What is our starting point (A)?
- Why does this work matter?
- Where to we want to be?/What is our end point (B)?
- What (do we think) needs to happen (to get from A to B)?

Most projects funded under this programme did not have an articulated Theory of Change of their own, and this was consistent with our impression that most could describe how they were working and why, but found it harder to describe what changes they were achieving with this work. We have produced ToC for the 4 case study projects³ – see **table 6** below. If Mercers’ find these useful, they may wish to explore producing them with other funded projects.

³ The Living Room already had a ToC which had been developed at the early stages of their project. This is a more developed version.

Table 6: Theories of Change for the 4 case study projects.



3.8 Revisiting the research evidence: match and gaps in the funding programme as a whole

The research review identified some of the current understanding about homelessness and ‘what works’ to tackle it. We compared the project outcomes against key themes, to gain an impression of whether the programme as a whole is consistent with the current evidence base. The summary observations are:

- **Key individual risk factors addressed:** The programme **does** fund projects that address some key known individual risk factors, particularly poverty, unemployment, living in rented accommodation, mental illness and social isolation.
- **Key individual risk factors not addressed:** The programme **does not** fund projects that explicitly address other known individual risk factors, specifically long-term illness and disability, having children young, experience of childhood poverty and adverse experiences in the teenage years – although there may be some related unplanned outcomes.
- **For women,** common triggers for homelessness are sexual abuse, domestic abuse and loss of children. The programme **does not** fund projects that explicitly address these factors.
- **Key protective factors addressed:** programme **does** fund projects supporting ‘connectedness’, the availability of social and family support networks and education/learning, which are known to help prevent homelessness.
- **Health:** Homelessness is known to harm health in many significant ways. The programme **does** fund projects that aim to improve health.
- **Approaches** found to work best overall are housing-led, person-centred responsive/swift acting, employ assertive outreach leading to a suitable accommodation offer, ensure services address wider support needs, and collaborate effectively between agencies and across sectors. The Mercers’ programme **does** fund projects that aim to work in these ways.

Notably, the research review suggests that structural and policy issues may have more of an impact on homelessness than individual factors such as behaviour and risk – yet the projects funded currently focus overwhelmingly on the latter. It was evident that some organisations including; Project 17, Anchor House, the Passage, Cinnamon Network, through their wider work, were seeking to influence policy change and structural issues, but this grant funding was not necessarily directly aimed at this. For example, Project 17’s campaigning work to influence changes in the law and implementation of section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and Cinnamon Network’s role in supporting effective social change projects to grow and replicate. Mercers’ may wish to consider funding projects that seek to tackle some of the structural and policy challenges:

“If street homelessness is to be ended then we must address: the lack of settled accommodation, funding challenges, ineffective collaboration and commissioning, the needs of different subgroups, ineligibility of some people for publicly funded support, overly bureaucratic processes, and the need for stronger political will⁴”.

⁴ Mackie, Johnsen & Wood 2019: <https://www.usf.edu/cbcs/mhlp/tac/documents/supportive-housing/ending-street-homelessness.pdf>

3.9 Conclusions

21 projects (representing almost £1.4M investment) are working towards 79 agreed outcomes with a wide range of impacts. All these have or will have a positive impact, so that the programme as a whole is making a valuable difference to the lives of homeless or recently-homeless people. Additionally, 15 projects also told us about unplanned outcomes, which included some potentially ground-breaking work. Most projects are still underway, so we anticipate that the programme will go on to have further impact.

There is considerable social value delivered through this funding programme, but for some projects, there was a limited ability to articulate their understanding and awareness or varied capacity to evidence social value; some projects would benefit from a better understanding of their wider social impacts. Tools such as Theories of Change or case studies (although already used by some organisations) may help projects better understand and communicate their impacts and social value more effectively.

“We’re slightly ambivalent about outcome measures because it’s a lot of work. It’s great for funding but I don’t think it’s too useful, because homeless people don’t really need outcomes star to show whether their very basic needs are being met... Because for as long as we’re running a homeless shelter, we’re having an amazing impact: everyone here needs somewhere to stay”. Shelter from the Storm, Project Lead

By its nature, good community-based homelessness support must (a) react to presenting needs which are often extremely urgent, and (b) be generally individualised/person-centred. If situations arise or people arrive with needs that do not ‘fit’ with outcomes agreed with a funder, then an effective and high-quality service provider will respond in a way that prioritises reality over intentions. Some project leads verbalised this challenge powerfully:

In other words, both service pressures and good practice may lead some projects **not** to deliver agreed outcomes; this is not a shortcoming, and Mercers’ understanding and flexibility is appreciated.

The outcomes that were agreed with projects are generally consistent with what is known about homelessness, the risk and protective factors affecting individuals, and ‘what works’. In a few cases (those categorised as ‘other direct’) outcomes were agreed that are not necessarily evidence-based, but a relatively small amount of variety allows for work that is potentially ground-breaking. However, there are some identifiable gaps in the funding portfolio as a whole, including support for homeless women and projects seeking to tackle structural or policy issues.

4. Working with Mercers'

Key finding: All projects appreciate and value the support they receive from Mercers'. They particularly liked the relational approach and flexibility of the funding.

4.1 Perceptions of Mercers' funding

All project leads valued the funding they had received from Mercers'. For some, the money had been vital for the project delivery, providing a sense of relief allowing them to concentrate on the operation of their projects without worrying about finances.

"We would be shut without the funding from Mercers'...the problem would get bigger and bigger...I cannot tell you the relief in knowing that we are ok...for this period of time ..."

Hope4BarkingDagenham, Project Lead

Several projects mentioned they had received more funding than they had initially applied for as a result of the Grants Programme Managers' getting to know the organisations, the project and realising the potential. Others also received additional funds to help cover increased costs as a result of COVID.

Of additional value, was the flexibility of the funding and the opportunity (especially during the pandemic) to be able to use the money where it was most needed. This unrestricted nature of the funding was seen as unusual compared to other funders and massively beneficial.

"It's unrestricted funding which has helped us incredibly during COVID 19 because a lot of our funding is restricted... so it's given us a lot of flexibility and freedom to do our job and meet the ever changing needs of the homeless" 999 Club, Project Lead

4.2 The working relationship

All project leads and staff were hugely complimentary of Mercers' and the working relationship with them during the funding period. They particularly welcomed the ongoing support and understanding offered throughout the pandemic. Having a named contact and consistency in their support was also seen as beneficial.

Projects really appreciated the site visits from the Grants Programme Managers and Committee Members. Through these the projects felt valued and believed Mercers' really wanted to get to know the projects and see first-hand how their funding was being used within communities.

The notion and importance of values was raised again in terms of shared and common values between Mercers' and the organisations' funded. Faith-based organisations also appreciated Mercers' understanding of the importance of faith within their work, with one commenting ***"I get the impression they understand our Christian Faith and are supportive of that"***.

"Matt brought some of the Trustees along to see us... we could share our work and it was a tremendous encouragement that it wasn't just a financial transaction between us and the Mercers' but that it was work we were doing together" 700 club, Project Lead

4.3 The application process and annual reporting

The project leads had heard about Mercers' funding in various ways. Several had received Mercers' funding before, a couple mentioned having known their Grants Programme Manager previously, whilst others were new to Mercers' and had actively undertaken research to identify potential funders.

Almost all of the project leads had found the application process relatively straightforward, with several commenting on the benefits of the two-stage process favouring this to approaches used by some other funders. Most felt the whole application process and / or the amount of detail asked for hadn't been too onerous, with several suggesting it was commensurate to the amount of funding received. A couple of project leads had found the second stage of the application more complicated particularly in terms of producing the outcomes framework. However, it was also acknowledged that support was available from their Grants Programme Managers to help refine these, which again was seen as very valuable.

"We liked the fact that Mercers' was smaller and more intimate... [The application] quite straight forward really and quite expedient – an easy, smooth process". Shelter from the Storm, Project Lead

There was a recognition that there was a certain level of scrutiny and a need for Mercers' to ensure the projects and funding was well planned and this was respected.

"They're extremely supportive and flexible...I remember it being a bit of a challenge when I first did it... they were very sharp on funding... but the level of scrutiny isn't a bad thing...my impression was they needed to be reassured and they were very thorough..." Caritas Anchor House, Project Lead

Those projects that had completed annual reports felt the level of detail was required was reasonable in order to provide a full account of how the money is being used.

Some of the organisations / projects were relatively small with limited staff often heavily reliant on volunteers, who may have been inexperienced in bid writing, developing outcome frameworks and monitoring and measuring impact, compared to some of the larger organisations employing skilled fundraisers and project managers.

4.4 Conclusions

Projects were very complimentary about their experiences of working with Mercers' and valued the funding they received – without which some would not have been viable. In terms of Mercers' processes (e.g. funding application, reporting requirements) it was felt there was clear guidance and the amount of input and detail required, and that this was proportionate to the funding. Mercers' approach to working with the projects was similar to the approach adopted by the projects in their delivery – being relationship driven and this was highly valued. Project leads particularly liked the site visits by Grants Programme Managers and Committee Members along with the ongoing personalised support, especially during the pandemic. In comparison to other funders Mercers' requirements and approach were favourable.

- Mercers' funding is more flexible than most other funders';
- Processes are perceived as reasonable and proportionate;
- Mercers' approach is viewed as supportive, personal, flexible, and contributing to better outcomes and impacts

5. Learning and the future

Key finding: Most learning was a result of their experiences during the pandemic. In terms of the future there was a desire to sustain projects post Mercers' funding.

5.1 Learning from delivering the project and how this can be used in the future

Much of learning for the projects during the grant funding period was a direct result of COVID-19 (as already discussed in **section 2**). Because of the pandemic there was a lot of additional pressures which constrained some projects' ability to reflect. However, despite the challenges, lockdown had also provided a couple of projects with time and an opportunity to review their delivery models.

Other areas of key learning across the projects included; **Understanding more about their client groups** and how

"Our strategic view is how do we get to where we need to be to actually be equipped to support all these rises in homelessness...We are very aware that partnerships are very important and now more than ever, so we are investing a lot of time in developing and nurturing our partnerships" 999 Club, Project Lead

"We are constantly reviewing everything. The programme has been under review recently, it was an opportunity during lockdown to go through every element of the programme... Always adapting to the needs of the residents". Nehemiah, Project Lead

best to

work with them; **the need for flexibility and adaptability** to deal with ever changing needs; the importance and **value of volunteers** and; the **benefits from having strong partnerships** with other organisations and agencies. This was felt to be of even greater importance in the future, to meet the increasing demands on services.

Below are two project examples to help illustrate some of the learning.

Kings Lynn - Winter Night Shelter : Open access, 7 night a week for 5 months of the year (Norfolk). They have learnt a great deal about working with people with multiple complex needs (e.g. those mental health issues and addiction – who are often unpredictable in their behaviour) and the necessity to **"allow individuals to develop in their own time frame"** acknowledging that everyone is different and have varying back stories **"some people move on very quickly, whilst others it can take years"**. It was highlighted that it can be difficult if funders are results driven and expecting to see a certain number of beneficiaries to be supported and 'moved on' in a particular time frame **"it can make you feel like you've failed"**. However, they didn't feel that pressure from Mercers' **"[they] have been really supportive and understanding"**.

The Passage - Home for Good: Aims to prevent repeat homelessness by supporting volunteers partnered with someone with experience of homelessness, encouraging them to reach their goals (London). Through the project they have been amazed at how committed the volunteers have been in preserving to ensure engagement is maintained with the clients. They have recognised their value and praised their ability to be able to connect in meaningful ways, whilst also understanding the wider benefits this can have on both parties **"they [volunteers] are really skilled at being responsive to the clients' needs"**. They provided an example of how one volunteer took up running with their client resulting in **"improved health and well-being was also a benefit"**.

5.2 Opportunities to learn across the projects

The project leads and staff were asked whether they would be interested in sharing learning with other projects funded by Mercers' under this priority. Most said they would like to know about the other projects and they were all keen to hear about the results of the evaluation. However, there was a mixed response and caveats to actively engaging with other projects.

The majority of projects said they were happy to share learning and information about their work, providing it was meaningful, of mutual benefit and not too onerous. Several saw value in connecting with projects doing similar work to themselves.

Projects were mainly in favour of sharing resources using an online platform, provided this was managed by Mercers', as time was precious and delivery paramount. A few projects said they would welcome the opportunity to meet (in person or virtually) with other projects and the value you can gain from open conversations. One in particular, provided an example of having done this recently with a positive outcome. They had visited a similar project locally, learned about a funding stream offered by DWP, which they subsequently applied for and were awarded, he explained, ***"that's an example of how organisations working in isolation can often miss things"***.

"Mercers' funding has been absolutely instrumental in putting us in a space where we can go out and obtain more funding....it has enabled us to branch out and do further quality fundraising".

Great Yarmouth Pathway, Project Lead

5.3 Sustainability, threats and opportunities

All of the projects were hopeful they would be able to continue beyond the life of Mercers' grant. Most had been operating prior to receiving Mercers' funding but the on-going sourcing of funding was crucial to their survival and for some, finding funding was often a challenge and lack of it was a constant threat – particularly as COVID is likely to have an impact for a long time yet.

Several projects indicated they may have to deliver their projects in different ways, mainly due to the impact of COVID-19 (as discussed in **section 2**).

"Just knowing that you can reach out to someone who is in a similar role is really valuable". Beyond Food Foundation, Project Lead

In terms of future funding, those heavily reliant on Charitable Trusts, Foundations and community fundraising felt nervous about the future. Whilst some project leads felt very relatively confident having sourced and secured other funding already.

Mercers' grant had provided security to some projects during the funding period, allowing them time to devote to seeking new funding. Several projects also felt having received Mercers' funding has or will help leverage other funding giving them credibility when bidding to other organisations *"people like to back a winning horse"*. For others, Mercers' funding had allowed them to develop and grow, which again provided opportunities for the future.

5.4 Conclusions

Those projects that were well into their funding period had learnt a great deal and especially so during the pandemic – having to adapt to new ways of working and delivery. Projects had also learnt about working with their client groups and the need to remain patient and flexible to their needs.

Projects expressed an interest in learning more about the other projects funded under this priority heading with some willing to make contact with and share learning across their projects, especially where there were commonalities in their work or delivery models. However, time and resource are always key considerations; therefore, projects indicated that they would be unlikely to be able to give much time to this, and suggested that whichever mechanism for sharing was used that it should be implemented and managed by Mercers’.

Learning is of course ongoing, and it may be helpful to build into the grant monitoring or management processes ways of capturing learning systematically. Learning from the impact of and responses to COVID-19 may be especially valuable.

In terms of the future, organisations were optimistic they would continue to deliver their projects after their grant from Mercers’ has ended, though perhaps in different ways (as a result of COVID-19). Future funding would be necessary and although some had already secured monies, fundraising and bidding for grants was an ongoing challenge for most projects. Nonetheless, several projects said having received Mercers’ funding was viewed positively amongst other donors helping leverage additional funds.

Now turn to Part 3 to see our summary conclusions and recommendations.

