June 2026

THE MERCERS' COMPANY

Evaluation of Grants: Year 2 Church & Communities and Older People & Housing Programmes

Annual Report (2025)

Evaluators
Kerry Swain, Sarah Frost, Kathryn Crowther and Sue Cook

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the grantees taking part in this evaluation for their time, willingness and enthusiasm. A full list of grantees can be found on the learning space for the Evaluation Learning Team.

A special thank you to those who participated in the case studies:

- Christian Action & Resource Enterprise (CARE) – housing support
- Cripplegate, Islington Giving – Carers Panel
- Hackney Showroom – New Future Collective (Friday Lunch Club)
- MensCraft – Elders project
- Sydenham Garden – Sow and Grow project
- Footprints in the Community
- Caring Together – Befriending project
- Positive East - Older People's programme

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights from Year 2 Evaluation of Grants funded by The Mercers' Company (2025) - Church & Communities and Older People & Housing Programmes

Year 2 of this five-year programme-level evaluation looked at **145 active grants.** Evidence from monitoring data, a survey of grantees, interviews and case studies shows that Mercers' funding is improving people's lives, supporting resilient organisations, and aligning well with the Company's strategic priorities.

Reach of Grants

The 145 grants supported an estimated **75,800 people** alongside almost **5,500 volunteers**. Funding was mostly for **three-year grants** (c. £86k). Most of the funding supports project delivery, a significant proportion (38%) contributes to **core costs**, strengthening delivery and sustainability. For **71% of grantees**, Mercers' funding represents **10% or less of annual turnover**. Funding is focussed in 4 main geographical areas; London, Norfolk, Lincolnshire and the north East.

What the Funding Enables

Mercers' funding supports a range of projects that respond flexibly to need, including: place-based community hubs, befriending, health and wellbeing activities, targeted support for underrepresented groups, outreach and advocacy, housing and employment support, creative and cultural engagement, food security and poverty alleviation initiatives. Across both programmes, grantees identify the following approaches as critical to impact:

- Deep understanding of the people they support
- Valuing lived experience
- Building trust-based, non-judgemental positive relationships
- Being welcoming and inclusive
- Helping people connect with others
- Person-centred and strength-based
- Responsive and flexible

Co-production

Co-production is a growing feature across both programmes with many grantees involving project participants and communities in shaping, delivering and improving services and several actively developing their practice. Approaches used range from regular feedback and consultation to **formal co-design and participatory decision-making**. Grantees recognise that meaningful co-production improves relevance and effectiveness of services; builds confidence and skills among participants**;** strengthens organisational learning and sustainability. However, there is recognition that meaningful co-production requires significant time and investment.

Outcomes for People

The majority of grantees report **clear progress towards core outcomes**, including: improved wellbeing (92%); reduced loneliness and stronger social connections (85%); and increased support for people living in poverty (76%). Qualitative evidence from interviews and case studies reinforces these findings, highlighting improvements in people's mental health, confidence, sense of belonging, and feeling safe and valued.

Organisational Resilience and the Wellbeing Fund

95% of grantees report high levels of resilience - capable of adapting to change or unexpected disruptions. Key enablers of resilience include; strategic approaches to funding and partnerships, strong leadership, clear mission, effective use of assets, prioritising staff wellbeing and multi-year funding. Mercers' support has enhanced organisational resilience by providing multi-year core funding, stability, enabling long-term planning, staff retention, and improved partnerships.

The Wellbeing Fund (a small additional grant of up to £5,000), received by 64 C&C projects, was highly valued by grantees as an important feature that reinforces Mercers' relational and trust-based approach to funding. Used for team building, training, celebration of staff and volunteers, individual development or support, the funding helped to strengthen teams and acknowledge contributions by staff and volunteers. It also helped to improve staff wellbeing by reducing burnout and improving morale.

Challenges

Grantees are operating in a **highly pressured environment**, with rising demand, more complex needs, increased external costs, reduced statutory funding and growing competition for charitable funds. Key challenges include **short-term funding**, recruiting and retaining skilled staff and volunteers and limited time for reflection, planning and evaluation. Ongoing change within local systems and structures (e.g. local authorities and health) had also been disruptive for many.

Key Learning this year

People-centred, asset-based and co-produced approaches are central to impact across both programmes. Flexible funding, including support for core costs and wellbeing, strengthens organisational resilience in a unpredictable funding environment. There is appetite among grantees for further support around **evaluation, outcomes measurement and communicating impact**. There is an opportunity to extend the Wellbeing Fund across other programmes, further explore how co-production is used and also Mercers' role as an advocate for its grantees.

Working with Mercers'

Grantees' highly rated their experience of working with Mercers and valued the positive and supportive relationship with grant managers. Most found the application and reporting processes straightforward and less arduous compared to some other funders. The flexibility of the grant, being able to use the funds towards core costs, and the multi-year funding were seen as extremely beneficial for grantees.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE CHURCH & COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE & HOUSING PROGRAMMES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from Year 2 of the 5-year programme-level evaluation of grants[1] funded by **Mercers' Charitable Foundation** (MCF), the **Charity of Sir Richard Whittington** (CRW) and **Earl of Northampton** (EoN). This year **145 grants** were included in the evaluation. 101 of these were awarded under Mercers' Church & Communities programme and 44 were awarded by the Older People & Housing programme.

The evaluation was carried out by a team of independent research and evaluation consultants in 2025. Data for the evaluation was gathered through **grant monitoring information,** an **online survey** sent to all grantees. **Depth interviews** with **11 grantees** and **eight grantee case study visits** involving staff, volunteers, partners and a small number of project participants. The findings section of this report covers the following areas:

- About the grants, overview of the funding
- Project activity, delivery models, approaches and values
- Outcomes and impact
- Organisational resilience – deep dive topic Y2
- Wellbeing Fund
- Working with Mercers'
- Reflections and key learning for grantees

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE CHURCH & COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE & HOUSING PROGRAMME

The Mercers' Company (referred to throughout this report as Mercers') is a livery company, with a history dating back over 700 years. Each year it aims to distribute £10 million to charitable causes to improve people's lives, strengthen organisations and contribute to societal change. Focusing on relieving disadvantage in London, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and the Northeast of England, it supports around 180 individual organisations each year.

The Church & Communities and Older People & Housing programmes are two of the four programme areas Mercers' currently funds (Young People & Education and Heritage and Arts Programme are the other two).

The Church & Communities programme area funds organisations or projects that are either;

(a) **Building Stronger Communities**, focusing on:

- People in the most disadvantaged communities coming together to address what is important to them
- Community responses to support people who are refugees or homeless

[1] *This is a rolling grant programme so the numbers vary during each year. The number of grants included in the evaluation are taken from one set time point in the year (April 2025).*

(b) **Delivering Better Outcomes for Families and Carers**, focusing on

- Providing in-depth whole-family support to: families facing poverty or other challenges
- Supporting unpaid carers and their families

The Older People & Housing programme area funds organisations or projects that are either;

(a) **Combatting Loneliness Faced by Older People,** focusing on:

- Providing opportunities for older adults to foster new connections
- Providing opportunities to support and maintain existing relationships
- Working in areas with a high risk of chronic loneliness e.g. areas with high levels of deprivation, a high proportion of minoritised communities, a high percentage of older adults living alone

(b) **Combatting Poverty Faced by Older People**, focusing on:

- Tackling the cost-of-living crisis
- Addressing a lack of quality housing
- Providing support in the most disadvantaged areas

2. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methodology was used, capturing both quantitative and qualitative primary data from **145 active grants**[2] alongside secondary data[3] held by Mercers'. The different methods are described below, along with the number of grants engaging in each element.

2.1 THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

A thematic framework was used to design the survey and interview questions and for the analysis of data. This was informed by the commissioners' requirements and the themes and issues that had emerged from a rapid review of relevant evidence [4].

In addition, a 'deep dive' into **organisational resilience** was undertaken, as a theme for this year's evaluation.

2.2 MONITORING DATA

The **application data** submitted to Mercers' for all **145 grants** was reviewed. This was split by programme area as follows:

- 101 Church & Communities applications
- 44 Older People & Housing applications

Annual / progress report data was also provided for **105 grants.** The split was:

- 78 Church & Communities reports
- 27 Older People & Housing reports

Where more than one progress report had been received for an individual grant, the most recent progress report was included in the analysis. Data included:

- 53 Year 1 monitoring reports
- 39 Year 2 monitoring reports
- 1 Year 4 monitoring report
- 11 final monitoring reports
- 1 interim report

The base numbers vary due to differences in the number of grantees who provided information for specific prompts in the reports. Where there was a zero/0 return for a specific question then these have been removed from the analysis.

2.3 ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey was designed, using mainly closed questions, to collect data on project participants; approaches used; perceptions about the funding; key successes, outcomes and impact and a series of questions relating to this year's deep dive theme.

Smartsurvey was used to host the survey, and a live link was emailed to 145 grantees. 103 responses were received to the survey (yielding a credible 71% response rate) - 99 of these were full completions and 4 were partial completions. The partial completions have been included for the purpose of this analysis.

Almost 71% (n=73) survey responses were received from Church & Communities grantees and 29% (n=30) were from Older People & Housing grantees. This closely reflects the distribution of the 145 funded grants by the two programme areas included in the evaluation this year (70% and 30% respectively).

2.4 INTERVIEWS

A series of one-to-one in-depth interviews were undertaken with **11 grant / project leads**. The interviews further explored some of the issues raised in the survey and gathered a deeper understanding of experiences of delivering the grants.

A sample frame was designed using grantee information provided by Mercers' to ensure a mix of grants were selected for interview, taking into account, programme area, geographical location and funding entity. Those in their final year of funding were also prioritised. 7 grants were funded by the Church & Communities programme and 4 by the Older People & Housing programme.

These interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. All interviews were recorded with participants' prior consent and transcribed for analysis.

2.5 CASE STUDIES

In addition to those selected for interview, **8 grants** were chosen as case studies. These were undertaken during June-September 2025. The case studies represented the 2 programme areas, 4 geographical locations and the 3 funding entities **(see Table 1)**.

Table 1: Breakdown of grants selected for case studies

	Programme area	
	Church & Communities	**Older People and Housing**
London	1	3
North East	1	-
Lincolnshire	1	-
Norfolk	-	1

	Funding entity	
	Church & Communities	**Older People & Housing**
Sir Richard Whittington	1	1
Earl of Northampton	2	2
Mercers' Charitable Foundation	1	1

Base: Case study grants = 8

2 *This is a rolling programme with grantees funded at different times during the year.*

3 **Primary data** *is collected directly from original sources through methods such as surveys, focus groups and interviews.* **Secondary data** *is knowledge obtained from existing sources such as internal reports and other existing data.*

4 *A series of briefings have been produced to support this document. They are published on our* learning space

Seven case studies were conducted in person, and one was completed online. The case studies involved conversations with a range of stakeholders including grant / project leads, key delivery staff, volunteers and project participants, according to what was appropriate and practical for each grantee.

Three distinct but connected interview scripts were developed for use with the various stakeholders. Interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to 1 hour.

2.6 CONSENT/USE OF DATA

Participant information sheets were produced and shared with grantees ahead of the interviews and case study visits. These provided an overview of the evaluation, details about what the interview would entail, how the information they provided would be used, and a statement to make clear that participation was voluntary. Consent to record the interviews and potentially use quotes and audio from the recordings (for outputs such as report/film) was obtained at the beginning of the interviews. Names have not been used in this report or any other outputs to ensure anonymity.

2.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Relevant monitoring information was analysed, and selected data is presented to provide context on the grants and key supporting information. The data from the online survey was exported from Smartsurvey and analysed in Excel. Graphs, charts and tables have been created to present key data.

The thematic framework was used to analyse the qualitative data obtained via the in-depth interviews. The framework enabled the collation and presentation of the findings from the survey and interviews together. Verbatim quotations5 have been used to highlight key points.

2.8 LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to the data, as is the case with most research and evaluations.

The following three points relate to difficulties in comparing data across the programmes and between the grants due to:

(a) The **different, but overlapping, purposes of the two programmes.** Where there are relevant similarities / differences in data we have illustrated this within the key findings section.

(b) **The wide range of activities that the grants deliver**, ranging from regular-focused support to drop-in services. Also, some grants offered broader 'infrastructure support' (e.g. building organisational capacity) where the 'beneficiaries' were sometimes other organisations rather than people in communities.

(c) **The different stages** of their grant funding - some just getting started, some mid-way and some already ended. Also, **as a rolling programme** the number of grants will differ at different time points through the year and through the evaluation as a whole.

The purpose of the funding varied with some receiving core funding and others funded for a discrete element of their work or a specific staff member or intervention, it was difficult for some grantees to accurately provide the figures for some questions in the survey.

For the **quantitative data specifically** (i.e. data from Mercers' application, monitoring reports and the survey) there were limitations related to inconsistent size of datasets and differences in the data provided by grants. For example, not all had provided report data when the analysis was done and questions in the reports and surveys were not always compulsory, so the base numbers differed.

5 The majority of quotes used are from grant /project leads and key workers. Where these are made by other people (e.g. beneficiaries, volunteers, carers) we have attributed these accordingly.

Ascertaining the impact of Mercers' funding specifically was not always easy where the grant had contributed to a larger 'pot' of funding or towards a proportion of core costs. As is common with unrestricted funding, grantees were not always able to attribute confidently the impact of Mercers' funding specifically. In some cases, they talked about the impact of their project or Charity as a whole.

There were inconsistencies in the way grantees described their outcomes e.g. some focused on long-term change, some were unclear, and some described short-term outputs/deliverables. This created challenges when trying to make comparisons or collate outcomes data.

A **range of tools and approaches had been used to measure outcomes** meaning a lack of consistency in reporting. Very few were using validated outcome measurement tools consistently, and for most there was a heavy reliance on monitoring data and self-reporting, case stories, and anecdotal feedback.

Nonetheless, by using a mixed-method approach and drawing a wide variety of information, it was possible to gather insights, and a rich picture of the difference the funding is making across England.

3. FINDINGS

This section brings together both primary and secondary data captured from the various strands highlighted within the methodology section above. As mentioned in the limitations section the base figures do vary according to the time-point at which the analysis took place, base figures are displayed on all tables and charts to aid interpretation. A further data report with more detailed information and tables and charts can be found in **Appendix 6.1**

3.1 KEY GRANTEE DATA AND OVERVIEW OF FUNDING AWARDED

3.1.1 Key grantee data by programme area

Overall, **145 grants** have been included in the evaluation for Y2 / 2025. Church & Communities programme funded **101 grants** (70%) and Older People & Housing funded **44 grants** (30%). The majority were based in London (62% n=90), followed by 18% (n=26) in the North East, 10% (n=15) in Norfolk and 9% (n=13) in Lincolnshire.

Table 1: Number of grants by geographical area – overall and by programme area

	Overall		Church & Communities		Older People & Housing	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
London	90	62%	51	50%	39	89%
North East	26	18%	26	26%	-	
Lincolnshire	13	9%	13	13%	-	
Norfolk	15	10%	10	10%	5	11%
Other	1	1%	1	1%	-	
Total	145		101		44	

Base: Overall n=145, C&C n= 101, OP&H n=44 - Mercers' 'application' monitoring data

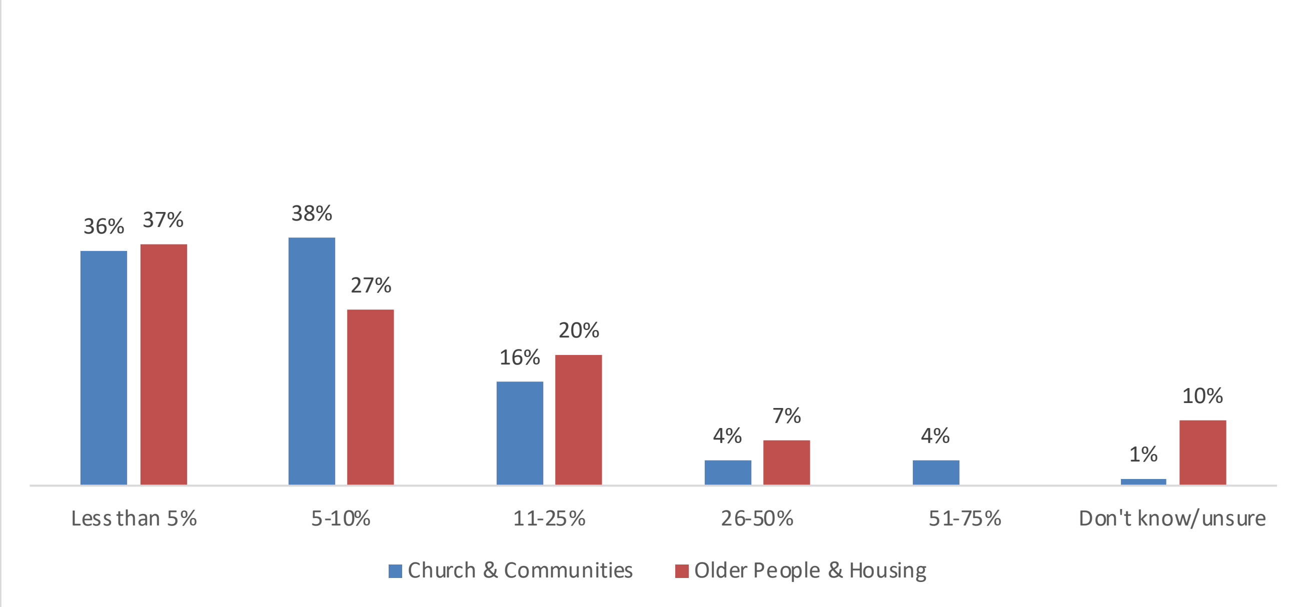
The **average amount of funding awarded** for the duration of the grants was **just over £86,000**, which is slightly greater than last year (£81,000). On average, those funded by the Older People & Housing programme were awarded more (£90,002) than those funded under the Church & Communities programme (£84,788).

The majority of granteeS (88% n=127) were funded over 36 months. This was similar for both Church & Communities (89% n= 90) and Older People & Housing (84% n=37).

The online survey asked grantees about the **percentage of Mercers' grant in relation to their organisations' turnover**. Over 7 in 10 (71%, n=73) reported that the Mercers' grant they received made up 10% or less of their organisation's annual turnover. Only 8% (n=8) reported their grant made up more than a quarter of their turnover, and none reported that their grant made up more than 75% of their annual turnover.

For both Older People & Housing and Church & Communities grantees the proportion of the Mercers grant in relation to their annual turnover was broadly similar **Figure 1.**

Figure 1: Percentage of Mercers' grant (annually) in relation to organisations' annual turnover, by programme area



Base: Overall n=103, C&C n=73, OP&H n=30 – Online Survey 2025

Most were were using the Mercers' grant for project delivery (70%, n=72) and around 2 in 5 (38%, n=39) were using their grant towards core costs. **Table 2** presents the breakdown of use of the funding by programme area.

Table 2: How Mercers' grant is used (by programme area)

	Church & Communities		Older People & Housing	
	No.	%	No.	%
Core costs	32	44%	7	23%
Unrestricted funding	10	14%	3	10%
Project delivery	49	67%	23	77%
Other	5	7%	1	3%

Base: Overall n=103, C&C n=73, OP&H n=30 – Online Survey 2025, multiple response question, so figures may not add up to 100%

3.1.2 Grant participants

The survey also asked which groups/communities their Mercers' grant was directly benefitting, allowing multiple target groups to be selected. For most the Mercers' grant was **helping those living in poverty** (71%, n=73). 3 in 5 were supporting **people aged 50+** (60%, n=62) or **people who were lonely or at risk of becoming lonely** (59%, n=61).

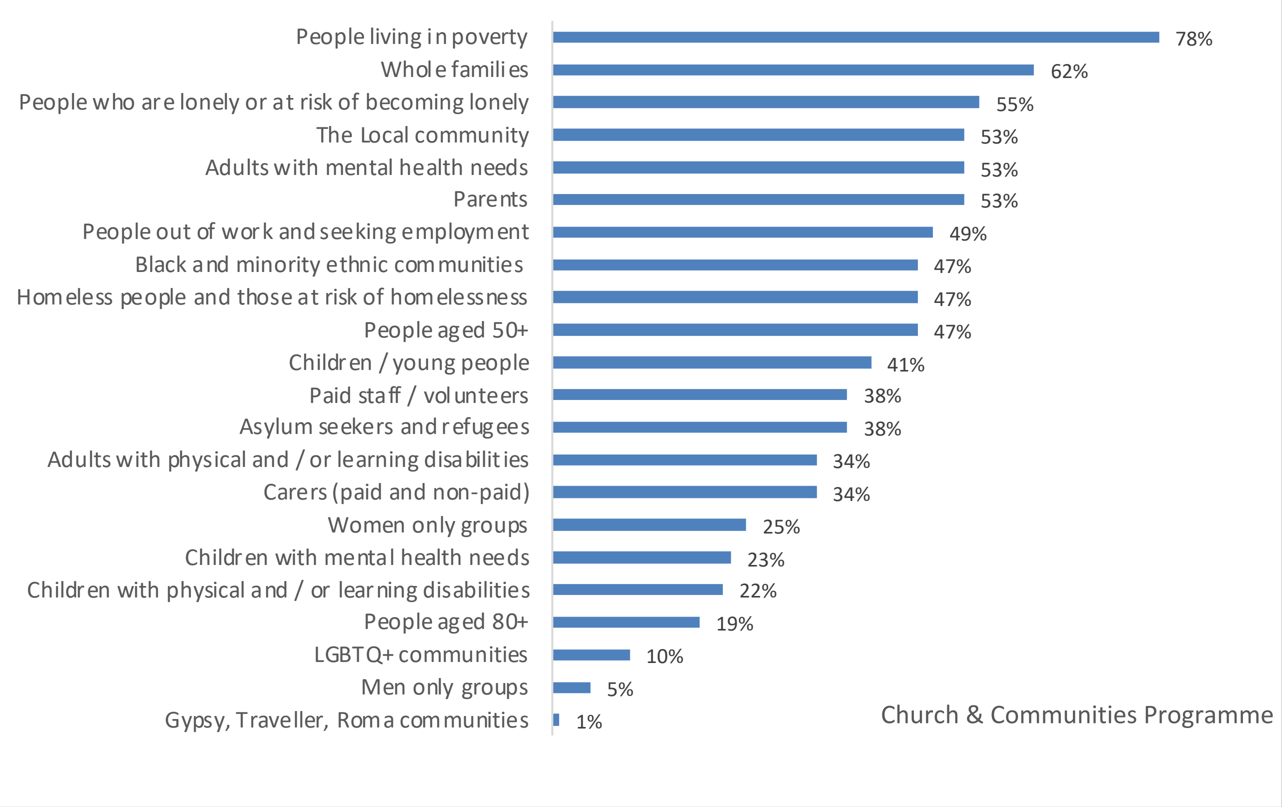
Church & Communities grantees were commonly helping those living in poverty (78%, n=57) and whole families (62%, n=45). Over half of Church & Communities grantees were helping people who were lonely or at risk of becoming lonely (55%, n=40), parents (53%, n=39), adults with mental health needs (53%, n=39) and the local community (53%, n=39).

Older People & Housing grantees were as expected mainly helping older people. Over 9 in 10 reported supporting people aged 50+ (93%, n=28) and those aged 80+ (90%, n=27). 7 in 10 were supporting those who are lonely or at risk of becoming lonely (70%, n=21) and 53% (n=16) were supporting people living in poverty.

'Other' specific groups mentioned were:

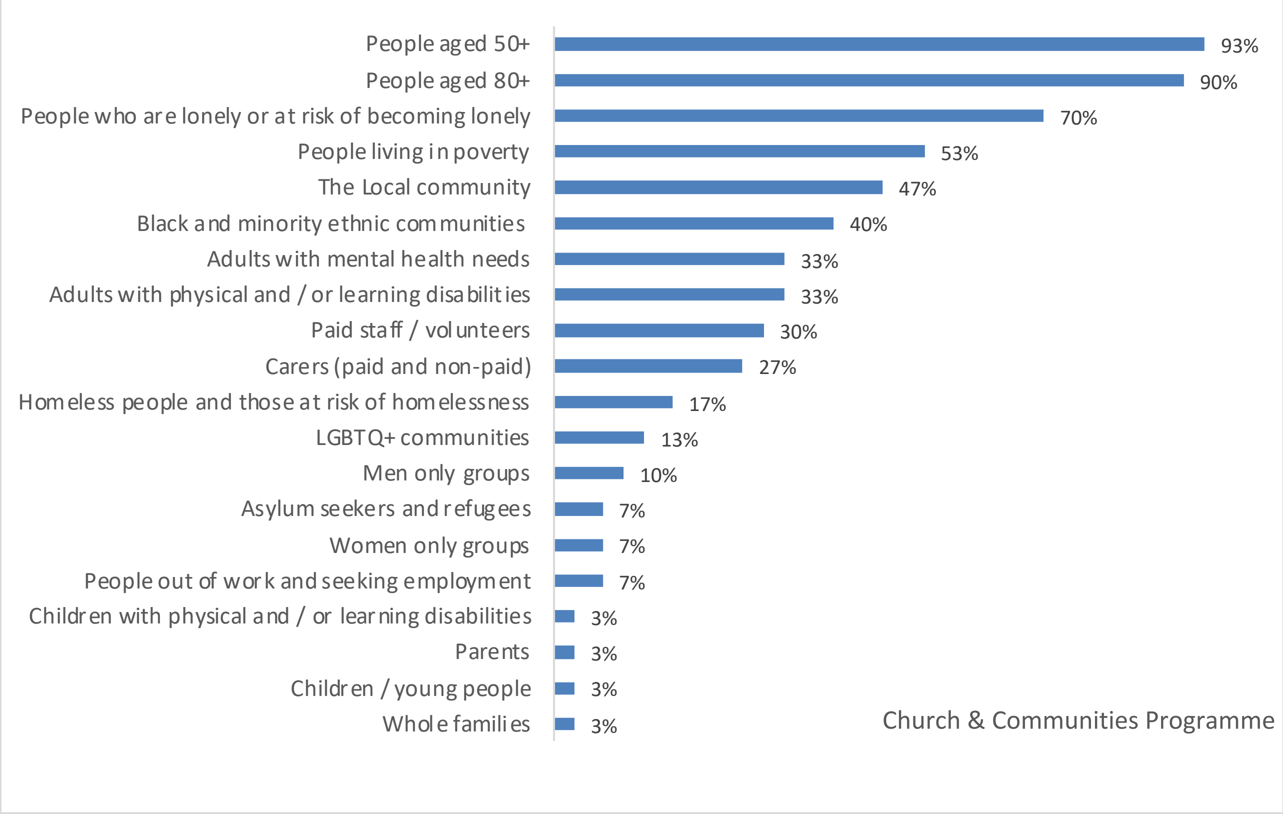
- EU Migrants
- Farming Community

Figure 2a: Grant participants – Church & Communities programme



Base: Overall n=103, C&C n=73– Online Survey 2025, multiple response question.

Figure 2a: Grant participants – Older People & Housing programme



Base: Overall n=103, OP&H n=30 – Online Survey 2025, multiple response question.

Data on the **number of people supported** by the grants (from annual / progress reports) showed that on average 766 people have been / will be supported per grant during this current year of funding. However, as the table below demonstrates there is a broad range across the grantees (between 15 people and 13,223 people).

Data by programme area highlights that Church & Communities grants supported on average a much larger number of people than Older People & Housing grants.

Table 3: Total number of people supported

	Overall No.	Church & Communities	Older People & Housing
Total number of people supported	75,797	68,001	7,796
Average number of people supported	766	975	289
Median[6] number of people supported	251	299	197
Range of people supported	15 to 13,223	15 to 13,223	19 to 1,118

Base: Overall n=99, C&C n=72, OP&H n=27 - Mercers' 'report' monitoring data

NB: 1 outlier has been removed for the purposes of the analysis (one grant that reported supporting 40,000 individuals). One grant specified that it supported 13,223 individual and has been included in the analysis. Five grants provided a 0/zero return for this question and have also been removed from the analysis.

6 The middle number in an ordered dataset.

3.1.3 Volunteers

Volunteer support is essential for many of the grants. Data from the annual /progress reports showed across the two programmes, almost 5,500 volunteers supported around two-thirds (n=83) of grants over the year. Figures were not available on the number of volunteers supported across the remaining grants due to gaps in the monitoring data.

The number of volunteers varies greatly across the different grants – depending on their delivery models (range 1-500). There were also some differences by programme area, with Older People & Housing grantees reporting a higher number of volunteers supporting delivery on average (93 volunteers) compared to Church & Communities grantees (57 volunteers on average).

Table 4: Number of volunteers that have been supported

	Overall	Church & Communities	Older People & Housing
Total number of volunteers who have been supported	5,455	3,504	1,951
Average number of volunteers who have been supported	66	57	93
Median number of volunteers who have been supported	32	32	38
Range of volunteers who have been supported	1 to 500	2 to 350	1 to 500

Base: Overall n=83, C&C n= 62, OP&H n=21 - Mercers' 'report' monitoring data.

NB: 22 grants provided a 0/zero return for this question and have also been removed from the analysis.

3.1 GRANT FUNDED ACTIVITIES, DELIVERY METHODS, APPROACHES USED AND KEY VALUES

3.2.1 Approaches, delivery methods and how the funding is used

Whilst just over a third of grantees (38%) used the funding for **core costs** and 13% for **unrestricted funding**, the majority (70%) were using the Mercers' grant for **project delivery**. Grantees deliver a range of creative, social, and wellbeing-focused support and activities for different beneficiary groups with some offering multiple strands.

3.2.2 Approaches

Funded organisations are using a diverse set of community-based, participatory, and capacity-building approaches to tackle social isolation, poverty, and inequality, and to strengthen local resilience. Delivery models included both work with individuals and group work, with Church & Communities grants offering more targeted 1:1 work than Older People & Housing, who tended to deliver more group activity.

The approaches used can be **grouped under the following broad categories:**

- **Place based community hubs**: Providing holistic, local responses to poverty and isolation through shared meals and opportunities for people to meet and socialise through community, culturally sensitive activities and offering vital services such as food banks, debt and legal advice.
- **Health and wellbeing support**. Reducing loneliness and increasing social connections through befriending, low-cost or subsidised community-based, age-friendly, health and wellbeing activities (e.g. arts, music workshops, walking groups, therapeutic support).
- Food security and poverty alleviation: Transitioning from emergency food provision to other food access models (e.g. social supermarkets and community grocery initiatives) often paired with advice and support services.
- **Targeted** support for isolated and **underrepresented** groups: Promoting positive ageing and addressing needs of specific groups e.g. older people living with HIV, people with early onset dementia, refugees and asylum seekers; people from ethnic minority backgrounds; people with disabilities; the agricultural community. Offering practical help, advocacy, social and wellbeing activities, and mental health support that promotes inclusion and empowerment.
- Employment and training support: Using specific skills training, mentoring, and casework to support marginalised groups including women, refugees, and people with complex needs into employment or education.
- Outreach, advocacy, and capacity building: Working with communities to build local leadership, develop community solutions, and enhance service access and inclusion for diverse populations.
- Support / befriending for carers: Providing regular breaks reducing isolation for rural isolated carers; respite and support for those caring for people with dementia.
- **Housing and crisis intervention:** Providing supported housing and crisis drop-ins, recognising secure housing as a foundation for overall wellbeing.
- **Spaces for reflection and identity**: Offering opportunities for older men, older people with HIV, people with dementia to discuss transitions into later life, loss, and caring roles, and to celebrate positive contributions and personal identities.
- **Creative and cultural engagement: Using** theatre, music, crafts, and gardening to promote wellbeing, confidence, and self-expression.

Examples of different models of project delivery

Participatory grant making / delegated budget: Carers are directly involved in shaping and deciding funding priorities for local projects that support their needs, building ownership, voice, and skills among residents. (Cripplegate / Islington Giving)

Community organising and leadership development: Grants in faith settings are using a relationship-based model to listen to local concerns, build teams, and support residents to develop leadership and agency. The work also focuses on strengthening the sustainability of churches through asset development and financial leadership. (Centre for Theology and Community)

Approaches

Grantees used a range of approaches or enablers to help them to achieve their outcomes. The following were deemed as most important with grantees rating them as **'essential or very important'** within the survey.

- Staff understanding the people they are supporting and their needs (100%, n=103)
- Listening to peoples' voices (100%, n=103)
- Building positive relationships with people (99%, n=102)

Analysis by programme area broadly shows similar views on the methods and approaches most needed to achieve outcomes (see **Table 5**). However, Church & Communities grantees placed greater importance on using peer-led approaches – 68% (n=50), compared to 53% (n=16) of Older People & Housing grantees. Church & Communities grantees also placed greater importance on using trauma-informed approaches [7] or psychological therapies with 69% (n=50), compared to 43% (n=13) of Older People & Housing grantees.

Table 5: Importance of methods and approaches in helping grants to achieve general outcomes (online survey)

	Church & Communities		Older People & Housing	
	Essential	**Very important**	**Essential**	**Very important**
Staff understand the people they are supporting and their needs	82%	18%	93%	7%
Listening to peoples' voices and choices	82%	18%	73%	27%
Building positive relationships with people	88%	12%	87%	10%
Helping people to connect with others	58%	40%	73%	23%
Using strength/asset-based/person centred approaches	71%	19%	60%	37%
Taking a learning approach/continually reflecting and improving within your organisation	60%	34%	63%	33%
Giving staff autonomy and flexibility to adapt to peoples' different needs	53%	41%	47%	47%
Working with the local authority and other key organisations and agencies	45%	41%	37%	33%
Using peer led approaches	38%	30%	13%	40%
Using trauma-informed approaches or psychological therapies	37%	32%	10%	23%

Base: Overall n=103, C&C n=73, OP&H n=30 – Online Survey 2025. This question used a 5 point scale (ranging from essential to not at all important) therefore percentages may not total 100%.

Further analysis from the interviews showed very similar findings. The interview data highlighted that **building trust and developing relationships** with participants was seen as being paramount to the success of grant. Being non-judgmental and treating participants as individuals, respecting them for who they are was an important element of this. Staff were often described as being caring and having a good understanding of the people they are supporting and their needs. Many referred to the grantees as feeling like a community.

"What people have here is a sense of belonging, a sense of community, a sense of family, almost" (Carer)

"We're absolutely non-judgmental, we're caring, we listen. I suppose we come at it from the understanding that we all experience difficult times. And that's what makes us approachable."

7 *Trauma-informed approaches recognise the impact of historic and current traumatic experiences on both beneficiaries and staff who are supporting them.*

Survey results showed that the majority of grantees (97%) saw the importance of 'helping people to **connect with others'** and in the interviews, several highlighted the importance of using **peer support or peer-led approaches** and involving people with lived experience.

"When you eat, you talk…you exchange your experiences…today, when I was eating, I was sitting with three other people, and we were talking about not being able to sleep really well, and what kind of medications we're on… it is good to have those exchanges with other people and their experiences." (Volunteer)

"Their solution to that was to form a peer group so …when [women] wanted or needed to travel, they…were upskilling themselves in the confidence of using the metro… and [creating] a peer group where they could travel together so that there were groups of women going rather than them having to go on their own and they were all accessing support groups outside the area."

"the biggest support is through their peers, actually…he's almost like an exemplary example of how somebody has come [here] having suffered a painful bereavement and he had such an amazingly positive mindset to go do new things, try things…and he did it for him in the first instance, but very much in that journey was contributing to others, particularly some of the younger guys."

The survey data also showed that most grantees (92%) used asset or strength-based approaches, identifying valuing and nurturing people's strengths (knowledge, skills, experiences) rather than focusing on their needs and problems. The interview data supported this finding.

"We believe everyone has the potential, we believe in people"

"Helping participants recognise they can still contribute despite their illness".

For some, taking an asset-based approach also helped to **build the volunteer base**, and develop services through identifying and utilising the talents, skills, and assets within communities.

"Our worker is brilliant at building relationships, but also then thinking, identifying people who always spend more time so that we develop the confidence. So, someone like [X], she used to come as a guest to the FoodShare, then becomes a volunteer. Then she started running her crafty crafters group and now she is the lead volunteer"

Being **person-centred and holistic in approach** was mentioned as important in the interviews i.e. understanding the whole person and their related issues rather than addressing single, stand-alone problems. This way of working also contributed to building relationships and trust. Some grantees offered **comprehensive support by integrating various services and working in multidisciplinary teams.**

"We are there for the person. The services come second. We're not to offer them one service… because people end up in their silos, in their in their boxes…we now have multidisciplinary teams….we've got is a health coach sitting next door to an advisor, sitting next door to a community development officer…their job is to work as a team and give that population absolutely everything that we can offer as an organisation".

In the interviews, the respondents described the importance of being **responsive and flexible.** Many explained how important it was to 'meet people where they are' and to adapt to individuals' needs, especially for those complex needs or crisis-related challenges. In the survey, the majority of grantees (94%) stated that 'giving staff **autonomy and flexibility** to adapt to peoples' different needs' was essential or very important.

"That wraparound care for people is really important, being flexible to their needs."

"I felt like I could talk to [named grant] about any barriers, they were very flexible with us, we all came to a mutual agreement on best days and times to meet… caring responsibilities can be unpredictable, so that was my apprehension at the beginning, but they were so accommodating" Participant

Partnership approaches and working with other key organisations and agencies was also highlighted as being essential or very important by most grantees (82% of those who completed the survey). Connecting with other providers helped some grantees expand the range of activities offered and provided more options for signposting people to other sources of support. For some, partnering with organisations has helped strengthen and sustain the reach and impact of the work.

"I think a lot of that is partnership… so for instance, I'm aware of parts of the city council who are doing door knocking. People …who are working with the commissioners to identify unidentified need, we're always kind of talking to those guys and community, faith groups, so we're connected with all of that as well"

"We've worked hard to build resilience by diversifying our funding streams and establishing strong partnerships with local statutory organisations, which has definitely strengthened our foundation."

3.2.3 CO-PRODUCTION

In the interviews, grantees were asked about the ways they used co-production to engage project participants to have a say on services / activities and provide new ideas, helping ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met. Most organisations saw the value of co-production and were keen to develop their practice around this.

"We are… focused on engagement of our members…supporting us to develop what we do … working alongside them all the time to…ask their opinions about anything we do"

"Regardless of anyone's previous experience, they feel they can contribute and be heard".

Some grantees had strong co-production approaches in place and others were developing or trying out different approaches or wanted to develop these further. Some organisations described themselves as **'community or user led'** – in the sense that they were **rooted in, accountable to, and directed by the community or members.** Others had staff, trustees and volunteers with lived experience. For some of these organisations, co-production was seen as a style of working rather than done through formal structures or an 'extra' activity.

A summary of some of the co-production approaches used by grantees is given below.

A. Engage via Regular Feedback: *Many regularly ask participants for their feedback and input on activities, encouraging them to share their ideas. This was done via feedback sessions, feedback forms, inviting verbal feedback during or after sessions or at events. In many cases this feedback was used to influence decisions and adapt delivery.*

Example: Vision Sundays, Centre for Theology and Community - to help people dream and identify short to long-term ideas. *"We had a series of vision Sundays. We got people to begin to dream …you have to give people opportunity to just think 'if you could do anything'. And so, we've identified short to medium to long-term ideas and now…we're going to take them to a local church that has done massive redevelopment, help them and think we could also do this and what could this look like to. then go to the feasibility studies and start to like slowly dream-build it out".*

Example: Monthly Co-production group, Menscraft: "We have a monthly [co-production group], but we'll often say within the different activities we do…is this working for you? Any suggestions to improve? Hopefully that invitation is always there in what we're doing."

B. Collaboration and Co-Design: Grantees gave examples of how participants had been involved in shaping or delivering activities, including through volunteering, sharing skills and expertise (e.g. art, cookery, music) or offering ideas for sessions or activities. Some did this informally and other used more structured processes as the examples below show.

Example: Steering groups to inform project design: YMCA Teesdale set up a steering group and invited participants (women and unaccompanied asylum seekers) to join to help shape the project: *"a lot of their wishes and a lot of their ideas- that's what's formed our project. It isn't us going 'you need this'. It's come from mainly [them]…they came together, and they co-wrote with us that project, they told us what they wanted to achieve from it. They told us what their issues were and their ideas for overcoming those issues that they were facing."*

"This was the first time we'd set up a steering group to do the user voice… we'd normally go to the youth groups, and we'd go, we've got this, we're going to apply for this money. What should we do with it?…This was the first time we set up a steering group for a new project and for us as an organisation, I know when we're launching a new project, we'll go back to that. We will do that as a matter of course, because we know it has added strength to the projects sustainability, the worth and the project's impact…This project was that next level of user voice for us…By the setting up of a steering group, they very much took ownership and that helped drive the project"

Example: Producing a strategic plan Mental health resilience and suicide prevention, Lincolnshire Rural Support Network *"it was really important to us that everybody took ownership of it and people can only take ownership of it if they feel that they've had an input into it. So we worked with the Cranfield Trust, and had somebody to come and help facilitate the process, which was really helpful, because otherwise, as the leaders within the organisation, myself and the chair would have had to facilitate the process rather than participate in it. We held a range of sessions with all of our volunteers to talk to them about it.. so, all the staff and all the volunteers, everybody was involved in this…We talked to them about what was important about LRSN, what our values are, were they right…what they thought our USP was. Then we talked to them more generally about what the issues were in the agricultural sector, what was needed, what support people needed, what were they seeing now…and in the future? And then what they thought LRSN's role was in that? Because we are not there to fix everything. And from that we developed the draft priorities, which then went back out to them, for their consultation. And then we came to a plan from that".*

C. Co-Delivery

In co-delivery models, community members share power in the design and delivery of the grant. Two examples of this were highlighted in the data.

Example: Carers Panel, Islington Giving, Cripplegate Foundation: Funding panel that puts carers at the heart of decision-making - giving them the power to shape the services and support they would like and need. They created two carers panels allowing them to inform the grant giving process and make direct choices about who fund. "They were really open about it being 'our' panel and we had a say in how we wanted to run it, so we had ownership of it…it was really empowering… for us as carers to be able to fund on our experiences and what we wanted to see being offered" Panel member (see case study for more details).

Example: Co-delivery of Social Supermarket, Spring Community Hub: *"We decided to let [parents] run [one of the holiday sessions] …we gave them…all the necessary training…and they joined us and we met together …and I learned then was the best session we ever had because we had their input…they were saying, "if you do it this way, it won't work. I know our people, they won't come" and that really helped us, our success is that it's never been about us. It's been about how we can help those who need that service"*

Challenges to Co-production:

Co-production **takes time:** *"Because we are taking people along with us, this probably slows down the process, but it's really important."*

Improving Co-production Practice:

Some grantees expressed a desire to **improve their practice** around co-production and saw the benefits of doing this.

"When we get to the latter stages of developing services…it comes in house…We design it ourselves and then we put it out there, whereas I'm looking to do…is about how we involve those people right through the journey so they would…be part of even the literature that we've created for it. Looking at the language we use and possibly, you know, using them to promote the thing because they can talk in a different way to what we can)

Some grantees had done **training on co-production** approaches in a bid to improve their practice in this area.

"We recognised…we were not bad at collecting feedback… occasionally doing consultation… I think we felt, oh, that's good, we're getting some good level of involvement from people and we're really hearing from people. …what this training has made us realise is there's a much more deeper and meaningful way that you can connect with people that you're trying to support, and that's really involving them in all aspects, even in the start and in the design or redesign of your work."

3.2.4 KEY VALUES

The approaches used across both programme areas are underpinned by a strong set of **common values** which reflect a strong commitment to community, inclusivity, empowerment, and holistic support. The core values cutting across all of the grants include;

- **Inclusive, accessible and welcoming**: Fostering a sense of belonging, open to all, ensuring everyone feels valued and supported, regardless of background. Showing empathy and compassion were core to this. *"We exist to serve and show love to our communities and those who we come into contact with".*
- **Empowerment and hope:** Enabling people to take control of their own lives, offering hope and encouraging self-confidence. Provide opportunities for people to have a voice and contribute meaningfully and supporting user-led initiatives and inspiring individuals to believe in themselves.
- **Equity and Social Justice:** dignity, equal opportunity, addressing structural inequalities, commitment to represent and advocate for marginalised groups. *"We believe… we have the ability to work with communities so that no one is left behind. And that is around working to instil hope in the hopeless, providing opportunities for young people and the community so they can believe in themselves, contribute to their community in a way that is meaningful to them".*

Example Values: HEDGER (Acts Trust). *"Our values spell the acronym of H E D G E R. We see values as like the boundary as to how we operate or like the hedge….we might have a lot of work to do in here, but we never step outside of the boundaries of our values."*

Honour: Treating people with dignity.

Empowerment: Helping people realize their own power to overcome challenges.

Determination: Commitment to persistence in their mission.

Generosity: Being generous with time and resources.

Excellence: Striving for high standards in organizational practices.

Relationship: Fostering friendships and partnerships

3.3 OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

3.3.1 Progress towards outcomes and extent of impact

Mercers' use an impact framework to help show the difference grant programmes are making to individuals' well-being, skills and employment; delivery organisations' resilience and leadership, and wider social change that helps to improve practice and build communities.

Figure 3: Mercers' impact framework

Survey respondents were asked whether they were already observing any of these impacts due to the support from Mercers' – with the majority stating they were. This was most evident in relation to improving people's lives (93%, n=95), followed by creating a stronger organisation (80%, n=82). 2 in 5 grantees (40%, n=41) expected their work to contribute to societal change this year or in the longer term.

Similar trends were observed between the different programme areas (**Table 6**). Over 9 in 10 Church & Communities grantees and Older People & Housing grantees had already observed an impact on improving people's lives.

A larger proportion of Church & Communities grantees were already observing impacts around creating a stronger organisation (83%, n=61), compared to Older People & Housing grantees (73%, n=21). For both programme areas impacts on societal change were viewed either to be less relevant (particularly the case for Older People & Housing grantees), or as being a longer-term impact.

Table 6: The extent to which the support from Mercers' has contributed to the following areas of impact, by programme area

	Church & Communities				Older People & Housing			
	Already seen	Expected this year	Expected Longer term	Not relevant to grant	Already seen	Expected this year	Expected Longer term	Not relevant to grant
Improving people's lives	93%	3%	4%	-	93%	7%	-	-
Creating a stronger organisation	83%	7%	1%	8%	73%	17%	3%	7%
Contributing to societal change	44%	4%	40%	11%	40%	7%	23%	30%

Base: C&C n=73 OP&H n=29 - online survey '25

Grantees were also asked about a range of **general outcomes for participants** being met/or likely to be met, from the support they were receiving from Mercers'.

The majority reported that they had already achieved outcomes around improvements in people's wellbeing (92%, n=94), feelings of loneliness (85%, n=87) feeling more connected with each other (85%, n=87) and people living in poverty having more support and information (76%, n=78).

Table 7 shows the top four outcomes were similar across both programme areas. However, Older People & Housing programme grantees were more likely to report improvements in people's health (87% already seen) compared to Church & Communities grantees (60% already seen). Whilst increased skills for participants were more apparent amongst those funded by the Church & Communities Programme (67% already seen) than Older People & Housing programme (47% already seen).

Table 7: The extent to which the support from Mercers' has contributed to the following areas of impact, by programme area

	Church & Communities				Older People & Housing			
People(s)...	Already seen	Expected this year	Expected Longer term	Not relevant to grant	Already seen	Expected this year	Expected Longer term	Not relevant to grant
Wellbeing improves	90%	8%	1%	-	97%	3%	-	-
Living in poverty have support /info	88%	6%	-	7%	50%	17%	3%	30%
Feel less lonely	85%	8%	1%	6%	87%	7%	-	7%
Feel more connected	83%	13%	1%	3%	90%	3%	-	7%
Skills increase (participants)	67%	10%	6%	18%	47%	7%	7%	40%
Are safer	64%	8%	3%	25%	50%	17%	3%	30%
Health improves	60%	8%	8%	24%	87%	10%	-	3%
Have volunteering opportunities	60%	11%	6%	24%	53%	17%	7%	23%
Have employment opportunities	43%	6%	10%	42%	3%	-	3%	93%

Base: C&C n=73 OP&H n=29 - online survey '25

Tables 16a, 16b & 16c in Appendix 6.1. show further data on the extent to which grantees are meeting their own outcomes.

The qualitative data from interviews supports the survey findings. The quotes below illustrate some of the key outcomes for participants - including improved health and wellbeing, making new connections and reduced feelings of loneliness, gaining skills and opportunities for volunteering or employment, and feeling safe and valued.

Improvements in health and wellbeing

"We talk about holistic wellbeing...about physical, mental and spiritual, whatever that spiritual means to you, ...I think what we've seen is the women are holistically healthier. ..they are better connected to the community, so they have a stronger support network within their own community...They have a sense of belonging, which we know improves your mental and emotional wellbeing. They belong to something more than just their family...their independence has increased."

"Given me support and someone to listen to me...and to discuss my anxiety and worries over caring for my husband." (Carer)

One volunteer noted potential **cognitive benefits**, how some participants' dementia appears to "lessen" as they become more relaxed. This grant helps participants "find themselves" and maintain their sense of identity.

"Taking part in this keeps alertness, brain health, keeping yourself active, the positive social aspects and engaging with the group of other people with similar interests" (Volunteer)

Many grantees cited specific **improvements in mental health** for participants.

"It helps me with my mental health. I don't feel isolated this day. I can't wait for this day, because I'll make sure I put a nice dress there....It's my big day." (Participant)

"There's a lot of people that come in suicidal and ...it's often the situation that they are in... it's rarely one thing - it's a whole range of things, whether that's domestic abuse, having left prison, debt, being a care leaver, mental health problems, drug and alcohol - it's all of it intertwined and actually to be able to sit down with people and unpick some of them and help them put their lives back together bit by bit" (Key worker)

"I came here for [mental health support], and it's helped me a lot... even now, I don't think I know what to do without this place." (Participant)

"In some instances we're saving lives.... I don't like to think that we rescue people and we mend it for men, but we enable men to improve themselves, to become better men, better fathers, better sons, better husbands, better friends and neighbours... every single one has, in a different way...improved their own mental wellbeing". (Project worker)

Developing social connections

"It makes a huge difference to people's lives because loneliness is a big contributor to physical as well as mental ill health. So I think just having that place to go and people can go to…five days a week if they want to… they also make friends that they can meet up with outside of the group as well. It's making social connections".

"I really enjoyed like connecting with the other volunteers and also the ladies at lunch and yeah it really provided me with a sense of groundedness…it really helped like me personally through a time of feeling quite lonely" (Volunteer)

"I would say the biggest impact that I see is around loneliness and isolation… for some… it might be the only time in the week that they leave the house and see other people, and I think…the impact of that just…can't be underestimated, really, They make friends and new connections which they continue outside of the lunch club."

Increasing skills and opportunities for volunteering or employment

"All of them [participants] have gone on to do other things…one of the women had no recourse to public funds …and had been very isolated in her caring role and no money for herself for years and has been on another panel…for making grants to asylum seekers and refugees. Two other panel members are setting up groups to use their experiences to support other carers."

"She came as a food bank client…. then she started volunteering in our cafe… then became our first full time employee… now set up her own business…running a little cafe and catering place".,

"I started off as a member, then got promoted to a volunteer, then run it, then volunteer, then run it, then volunteer. And now, now I get paid for six hours a week" (Project Worker)

"It's been really positive - taking me out of my bubble… it's provided so much opportunity and growth" (Volunteer)

Feeling safe and valued

"Participants feel it's safe and non-judgmental…allowing them to flower and flourish" (Volunteer)

"It's like an HIV family…HIV stays outside, but here's a safe space…that we know that we have HIV, and it's okay, and we're quite diverse."

"I think having just a place that feels safe and routine that they can come back to and show up no matter how they're feeling that day". (Volunteer)

"It makes them feel less judged. It makes them feel at home, it makes them open up more because they know that it's a safe environment and people will not be cross with me just because I feel down at the moment, or I'm going through stuff in my head that I just want to feel like screaming, and for someone to just listen to you makes you feel like, 'Oh, I'm actually valued'… the feeling of belongingness." (Participant)

"The group encourages [my wife] to do things, helping her feel less frustrated about her reduced capabilities and giving opportunities for her to do some of the things she used to… and now finds difficult." (Carer)

3.3.2 How grantees were measuring outcomes and evidencing impact

Grantees were asked how they were **measuring outcomes and evidencing impact** and about their experience of doing this. Whilst the methods and type of data collected vary widely, there is a common emphasis for most on both qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate impact. Some grantees have developed more sophisticated systems and capacity than others. Just under half (42%) the grantees surveyed said they would value support with evaluation and communicating value.

Quantitative data collected included number of project participants, number of sessions /outputs, and demographic data in some cases. **Qualitative data** on participants' experience of the project (process) and the changes for them (outcomes) were also collected.

Grantees are using a variety of methods to measure outcomes, ranging from routine monitoring data collection to more structured evaluation tools. Some are capturing qualitative data through case studies, focus groups, video diaries, and anecdotal feedback /informal conversations. Others are using reflective practice and post-session reviews to gather qualitative feedback.

Some grantees are also using bespoke systems and feedback cycles to improve their data capture and evaluation practices. Others are using CRM systems to streamline their data collection and monitoring processes. Feedback forms and surveys issued in person or digitally at various stages (e.g., baseline, post-activity) are also used to measure change and capture feedback. Some grantees are using outcome measurement tools like the "outcome star" or other standardised measures (e.g. Harvard University Flourishing Index, Fear of Falling indices, Dialog Plus, Activities of daily living) to track changes and improvements for participants and volunteers.

Some grantees had sought specialist evaluation help and support through working with universities or commissioned an independent review of some aspects of delivery.

3.3.3 Challenges faced in measuring outcomes and evidencing impact

Given the nature of the grants and the time it takes for long-term change to occur, it can be hard to identify clear, relevant, measurable indicators and outcomes that accurately reflect progress and impact. It can also be difficult to attribute changes directly to the project activity. This year, challenges in measuring outcomes mentioned related to the following areas:

- **Consistency of data collection**: Consistently collecting accurate and comprehensive data can be a challenge, especially in large or dispersed organisations.
- **Lack of time, skills and resources** to collect qualitative data, stories and feedback when staff time is tight and participants are facing multiple issues.
- **Technology and limitations of internal data management systems,** e.g. outdated or incompatible technology systems, need for manual workarounds, costs of tailor-made CRM solutions.
- **Choosing and using the right tools:** Finding appropriate tools for certain groups was difficult e.g. people with dementia.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**: Ensuring all stakeholders are engaged and understand the importance of monitoring and evaluation.

Some grantees saw impact reporting as one of factors that supported their better resilience (see 3.4.2).

3.4 ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

Each year the evaluation will undertake a 'deep dive' into one of 4 key areas. This year the focus has been on **organisational resilience**.

There was a strong correlation found between concerns and approaches of the funded organisations and the national research that formed the basis of the briefing provided by the current researchers in 2024. Evidence Briefing: Organisational Resilience

Background research (cited in the evidence briefing) shows that resilience enables organisations to take advantage of new opportunities, be more sustainable, offer better wellbeing for staff, and ultimately leads to greater impact and better outcomes for participants. The VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) / non -profit sector is under pressure from many sides: increased demand for services, raised costs of delivery, competition for funds and more generally an increasing pace of change, technological innovation, and uncertainty. Although negative impacts of covid are still very strongly felt (including individual burn out and organisational strain in terms of depleted reserves, increased expectations and habitual urgency), the pandemic also accelerated change. For example, it increased collaboration, reduced red tape and barriers between organisations, and created a laboratory for trying new ways of doing things. It was a catalyst for organisational change. Research shows that organisations that survived the pandemic and other crises well, have certain characteristics and ways of working that make them strongly resilient and that there are approaches to developing those strengths that others can adopt.

This section of the report explores the levels of resilience, challenges, and approaches of organisations in the cohort, and looks at Mercers' contribution to organisational resilience.

3.4.1 Resilience levels

Nearly all grantees (95%, n=95) thought that as an organisation they were able to adapt to change or deal with unexpected disruptions (28% very able, 67% fairly able). The remaining five grantees stated that they did not know, or it was hard to say. As shown in **Table 8** below there were no real differences observed in views between the different programme areas.

Table 8: Ability to adapt to change or deal with unexpected disruptions (by programme area)

	Church & Communities		Older People & Housing	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Very able	19	27%	9	30%
Fairly able	48	69%	19	63%
Hard to say/Don't know	3	4%	2	7%

Base = C&C n=70 OP&H n=30 - online survey '25. NB: no responses given to 'not at all able'

Grantees reported an increased resilience in dealing with change or unexpected disruption. Over half (55%, n=54) felt they were becoming more able to adapt to change or unexpected disruption, 36% (n=36) felt that there had been no change either way and only 7% (n=7) of grantees felt that they were less able to adapt.

A greater proportion of Church & Communities grantees felt that they were able to adapt to change or unexpected disruptions (57% vs. 50% of Older People & Housing grantees). However, there were 7 Church & Community grantees who felt that they were less able to adapt to change or unexpected disruptions. Supporting comments highlighted financial pressures as being a key reason for being less resilient.

In interviews, in line with the survey findings, organisations reported **feeling positive about their levels of resilience:**

> *"I think it's better than it was a few years ago, which is probably a bit surprising in the current economic climate. I think we've grown quite a lot. And I think when you grow, obviously you have different funding for different projects, but each part of funding in a way contributes to the core costs of the organisation.".*
>
> *"Everyone has to touch wood when we say this, because we are in the best place we've ever been in terms of resilience, we're going against the trend of what's happening in our sector. We sit across a number of different sectors… In all those sectors it's a time of crisis of resource, so we have sort of bucked the trend in terms of resource and support, as particularly we've grown in terms of core funding in the last few years and multi-year funding."*

Survey respondents were given a series of statements and asked to what extent they agreed / disagreed with them. Overall, grantees were very positive about their organisational resilience.

- 99% agreed (91% fully) they had a clear purpose and vision.
- 96% agreed (65% fully) they have effective leadership at senior staff level.
- 97% agreed (49% fully) they have effective networks and partnerships.
- 95% agreed (52% fully) they have effective leadership at board level.
- 100% agreed (64% fully) they are aware of the external environment.

Most grantees also agreed they were able to effectively capture and communicate the impacts of their work (83% agreed) and that their finance and operations were fit for purpose (87% agreed).

The time to reflect, think and plan was an area that grantees felt less sure about with over a fifth (23%, n=3) stating that they disagreed that they had time to do this.

Table 9 below shows the responses by programme area. Church & Communities grantees were positive about their organisational resilience:

- 99% agreed (79% fully) that they had a clear purpose and vision.
- 96% agreed (63% fully) that they have effective leadership at senior staff level
- 100% agreed (46% fully) that they have effective networks and partnerships
- 100% agreed (59% fully) that they are aware of the external environment
- 92% agreed (51% fully) that they have effective leadership at board level

Some Church & Communities grantees were less sure about their organisational resilience regarding being able to effectively capture and communicate the impact of the work (7% disagreed that they did this, and 11% were unsure), and having adequate time to reflect, think and plan (22% disagreed and 20% were unsure).

Similarly for Older People & Housing grantees, reported organisational resilience was positive:

- 100% agreed (87% fully) that they had a clear purpose and vision.
- 100% agreed (53% fully) that they have effective leadership at board level
- 100% agreed (59% fully) that they are aware of the external environment
- 97% agreed (70% fully) that they have effective leadership at senior staff level

Whilst most Older People & Housing grantees agreed that they have effective networks and partnerships (57% fully agreed, 33% agreed), there were 7% of grantees that disagreed this was the case.

Table 9: In relation to your organisation – the extent to which grantees agree with the following statements (by programme area).

	Church & Communities					Older People & Housing				
	Fully agree	Agree	Neither / nor	Disagree	Fully disagree	Fully agree	Agree	Neither / nor	Disagree	Fully disagree
We have a clear purpose and mission	79%	20%	1%	-	-	87%	13%	-	-	-
We have effective leadership (board level)	51%	41%	6%	1%	-	53%	47%	-	-	-
We have effective leadership (senior staff level)	63%	33%	4%	-	-	70%	27%	3%	-	-
We are aware of the external environment	59%	41%	-	-	-	77%	23%	-	-	-
We have effective networks and partnerships	46%	54%	-	-	-	57%	33%	3%	7%	-
Our finance and operations are fit for purpose	37%	47%	11%	4%	-	37%	57%	7%	-	-
We effectively capture & comm. the impact of our work	21%	60%	11%	7%	-	40%	47%	7%	7%	-
We have adequate time to reflect, think and plan	10%	47%	20%	21%	1%	20%	30%	27%	20%	3%

Base = C&C n=70 OP&H n=30 - online survey '25.

3.4.2 KEY FACTORS SUPPORTING RESILIENCE

Interviewees reported a number of different factors, both internal and external, that supported their better resilience.

A smarter approach:

Organisations showed sophisticated understanding about the different dimensions of resilience and strength, and were adopting a more strategic, intentional and active approach in developing new income streams and partnerships. Having survived the pandemic as an organisation, and having had to make difficult decisions under pressure, had built confidence in their mission and ability to deliver. There were some well thought-out and comprehensive definitions of resilience provided:

"Rooted in strong governance, leadership, relationship management, adaptability to external changes, and the ability to lever funding and evidence impact"

"Adaptability, partnership working, valuing and supporting staff and volunteers, and maintaining well-being in the face of ongoing change and increasing demand"

"We've worked hard to build resilience by diversifying our funding streams and establishing strong partnerships with local statutory organisations"

"We feel confident and resilient around our service model - we know it works and delivers real impact for our community. Having navigated Covid, we know we can adapt quickly to maintain some core elements of our model, and to pivot resources".

One organisation was in the process of a body of work designed to improve their resilience and viability after a raft of cuts to staff and services last year. "We went through a theory of change process and then we developed a strategy. And I said, what we need to be doing is understanding our priorities, what are our charitable objects, what are we good at, where is the need for us and can we do things to get there and make a difference? Right now, all the work we've done on strategy development is landing in the organisation. It's starting to shape the website, the prioritisation of funding to pursue, to shape contracts that we'll go for".

Consolidation "We've been through significant growth in the last five years. In the last two years, our income has doubled, in the last three years, it has tripled. We reached the point where we were doing really well and it was a change of strategy that did this, which was about applying for longer term funding, like the Mercers'. There was a stronger retention of people as well. So, we are at the point where it's about how do we keep it at this level? We don't necessarily want to grow in terms of number of people, but it's thinking, how do we make sure that we make ourselves strong?"

New ways of working, improved business models and restructuring:

Interviewees reported a range of changed approaches to delivering services and building income streams.

Rationalisation, bringing in expertise, and reducing costs: "Our core costs, the CEO, the finance director, HR all of those sorts of costs that are always there are now covered because of our new approach to housing. So, it allows us to really focus our time on mission, what we want to do that meet our mission because we're not chasing the money".

"We keep costs lower by being quite a lean organisation with a small management team and using lots of freelancers".

Investing in expertise helped one charity to generate Enhanced Housing Benefit and increased the number of people housed: "At the time we didn't really have anyone with real housing experience so the trustees did agree to employ a housing manager who has all of that experience of dealing with landlords and knowledge of compliance and processes... so we have gone from housing maybe 4/5 people in a year to being really proactive and now housing over 49 people already this year".

Changed job descriptions and approach to work:

Several organisations had employed additional frontline staff, freeing up senior staff time for strategic development work and fundraising. They reflected on the positivity and flexibility of staff team, and their willingness to accept change and work flexibly. "Our youth and community lead manages a number of projects because it then means that as one comes to an end, we can take stock of what's needed... Her job description is written in a way where it can twist and turn based on needs. So, we've set up our team in a way that supports resilience".

Levering the value of built assets:

For several grantees using the value and power of their built assets was a key area of development. For one, capital funding has helped them improve the building so they can run more activities and earn more money through external hires, for another rental income on a row of shops brings in £25k a year, more than a third of their turnover. Several others were investigating potential for housing developments.

"We own the building. And we also know that there is a lack of affordable housing for that community in that area, so for last two or three years I've been floating the notion that we need to do something better with the building to realise it as an asset. Whether we can put accommodation on the top floor, affordable accommodation on top floor. and then provide support services on the ground floor so it starts to feed itself".

Range of services and funders – spread risk (issues more acute for smaller organisations?)

A number of organisations cited the range of services and funders they had as key to their resilience:

"Being part of a wider offer / bigger organisation with multiple strands, having a varied number of services ensures that we can continue with these things, regardless of how the funding sits."

They were building up other income streams and new services with different partners. Examples included working with new statutory partners beyond local authorities, public health and local care networks. "One of the local care networks is funding a functional fitness project, which is sort of assessing people's level of fitness...with a view to sort of encouraging them to exercise...So that's come with a pot of money. It's gone very well. So, I think it's kind of opened the door, probably to us being able to access other funding of that type. I think we've previously depended too much, maybe on local authority funding. And local authorities are always very strapped for cash."

Leadership and clarity of mission:

In line with the survey findings interviewees saw strong leadership, an active and engaged board, and clarity of purpose as key to their resilience, several had actively improved board skill set with this in mind.

> *"I think we've got a really good chief exec, who sets the ethos for the organisation and that ethos ripples down, with any organisation, it starts from the top...So, our chief exec helps make us very, very resilient."*
>
> *"We have appointed new board members with tech expertise: HR, IT, health and safety"*

Demonstrating impact and using data to improve services:

Some interviewees were actively engaged in improving how they demonstrate impact and there were some sophisticated uses of data in place: "We've gone from very much that information being used by me and the more senior leaders in the charity and trustees to trying to, get some of the service delivery leads to just take a step back and look at the data a bit more regularly. So, we've just created a slightly different sort of internal session around quality where we will look at our service data and go, how's our blood pressure results looking across the entire cohort? Why have they suddenly gone up all down? Is that great? Should we be going, this is amazing or is there something we're a bit worried about"

In some organisations practice was clearly underdeveloped and they were engaged in improvement:

> *"We need to be much more systematic and robust on evidencing what we do, why we do it, and why we're really good at it".*
>
> *"We've been very good at incubating things because funding was short term. Now we are thinking seriously about learning, impact and evaluation. We also need to how our processes and how our operations match what we do."*

Some organisations struggled to articulate their evaluation methods and processes at all, describing only basic monitoring.

Prioritising staff wellbeing:

Staff wellbeing was seen as an important factor to support the resilience of both team and organisation:

> *"Internally this is time to pause and reflect together as an organisation and invest in staff development, ongoing supervision of front-facing staff, and inspiration for senior staff around looking after staff well-being.*
>
> *"The organisation itself...looks after the staff. It cares. When you work for an organisation that you actually care about and you care about what you do, you take a bit of ownership of it... you're proud of where you work and what you do".*

Partnerships

A small number of interviewees mentioned partnerships as a key element of resilience, the support received from partner organisations and membership bodies and being part of the local infrastructure is important. *"The authenticity of the relationship means we've been able to take risks, because we know that they trust us. So, if we want to step outside the box, or do things a bit differently, or challenge them, we feel like we can, because there's an underlying trust there".*

3.4.3 CHALLENGES TO RESILIENCE:

The general funding environment:

Interviewees identified funding as a major issue: competition for funds, reduction in local authority funding and an unstable funding environment with rapid and unpredictable change.

They described a generally negative environment with frequent news of charities closing, trusts and foundations ceasing operation and funding bids being rejected.

> *"I think the sector at the moment is in a really difficult position, there's increased competition for funding, there are more charities wanting the same bite of the same apple.*
>
> *"The reality is that no matter how good our income generation strategy is, we're still at the mercy of what's actually available out there. The statutory funding pot has shrunk dramatically while competition has become fierce, and trust funding is increasingly competitive with ever-narrower eligibility criteria. –... despite our best efforts, we're actually less resilient overall than we were before"*
>
> *"(Trusts say) we're closing our doors for applications because there's so much demand for funding. There's so much pressure that we are only going to fund those we've previously funded. We're not entertaining any new applications at all. And some of them have said, we're winding down. We're shutting"*
>
> *"One of our local grant makers said they had a 3000% increase in applications to one of their programmes. And they've now had to change their application process, where it's essentially, it's a first come first served"*

Organisations described the challenge of asking for repeat funding from few supportive funders:

> *"My concern has always been with the projects that we have that are grant dependent, there is always going to be a period of time where your funding is fallow. They say 'we love what you're doing. It's great, but this year we've got a different priority"*

They reported that the challenge of securing long-term core funding was key to resilience, as short-term grants make it difficult to plan and retain staff. However, most grants are project-based and there's an imperative to demonstrate you're providing something new and innovative:

> *"I do sometimes have a bit of a concern about those things as it's always focused on the innovative and the new and not the continuity...some funders will say, well, you've got to provide something different and actually, why?"*

They identified specific issues around changes in funding environment:

Reduction or loss of local authority funding: *"We've had funding support from them over the years, but it has just depleted and depleted and depleted, and, that has a really big knock-on effect, because we need (local authority) support as kind of match funding, really, or just to evidence when we're going to other places....They stopped their funding cycle for about 9 months, because they had a complete overhaul, and they've now put in, then, a new funding program in...littered all over the program in red pen is 'the pot is reduced'..."*

System restructuring, relationships lost and the sector not being heard: Organisations described significant challenges presented by NHS restructuring and devolution.

> *"The hospital has gone from having three independent hospitals to a group structure. So they're focusing on that. We've got the ICS who are going down by 50%. You've got NHS England being disbanded. You've got devolution. We've also got a mayoral candidate. So everyone's now just disappeared. You can't speak to anyone for love or money".*

This destabilising of structures and relationships is particularly serious for organisations seeking to secure contracts for work that has been proven in pilots. Even with the best evidence it has sometimes proved hard to get commissioners to listen to the sector.

> *"Chris Whitty published his report in 2023 and two of my services were in there as glowing examples of voluntary sector delivery, care closer to home, exemplifying the strategy of the NHS. Three months after that, both those services got cut. And so my brain goes, I cannot do any more here. There's something cultural here about the system, why is no one knocking on my door going this thing in Chris Whitty's report, how do we get this thing? And then, three months later, they've gone and bought a contracted physio team at five times the cost of my staff who are doing half a job that my team are doing. And so that's the challenge with resilience that, you know, A plus B doesn't equal C".*

Poor tendering practice:

An interviewee described a process where one big contract with a county council changed from grant to competitive tender creating a huge volume of work for the CEO. A gap between the grant ending and the announcement of tender meant they had to make 10 staff redundant and stop the service provision. In the end they won the tender but there was a huge impact on the organisation in terms of time, morale, lost expertise, and redundancy costs.

Rising costs:

Rising external costs: rent, utilities, fuel, transport, warehouse rent and increases in National Insurance contributions were all cited as serious concerns.

The nature of the work and external policy factors:

Organisations described the nature of the work as an additional challenge to resilience. *"All our staff are really, really positive about the work we do and it's not easy and sometimes it does feel stressful because we are dealing with human people with sometimes really complex situations and sometimes a lot of the work we do is really sort of heart wrenching and really, really sad"*

One interviewee summed it up: *"Internally, this is the shadow of charity work; rushing, urgency, vicarious trauma through the experiences of our beneficiaries, precariousness of funding and contracts, lack of competitiveness of salaries to the private sector. Externally it's the precariousness of statutory services and their ability to meet rising needs of local residents (we see the overspill of this) – it is also big factors like benefits reform, and seeing the real term impact of anti-immigration rhetoric and anti-trans rhetoric on the everyday impact of some of our community members."*

3.4.4 STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

Interviewees were asked what, apart from funding, might help strengthen their organisations' resilience.

Many would like support to ease the pressure on CEOs, especially those of small organisations who juggle many different roles and have to be specialists in all areas of management:

> *A dedicated operations manager: "Sometimes we may feel overstretched because I oversee programmes, I do work on the grant and then I have a SMT role as well".*
>
> *Specialist help: "One of the challenges for me is HR issues. Because no matter how wonderful your team, if you do get a member of staff that is causing a problem and it does happen at time to time, as a small organisation, we don't have an HR department. You know, that is me, basically. We have HR advisors, we pay for access to advice, but it's time consuming"*

Time to work on new funding streams and income diversification, and to develop partnerships. One organisation had invested reserves into a new partnership coordinator post designed specifically to generate corporate partnerships.

Resources to rebuild organisational culture post pandemic, post work practice changes, and changes of staff. A programme of work to reintroduce in person meetings and awaydays and information sharing across different parts of the organisation. *"We used to have every quarter all key managers simply get together for a morning to talk through what was going on in their world, and you would have a mixture of what's happening in terms of projects, what needs are identifying, new ideas and approaches for making a difference… A lot of exchange across the organisation, that died with Covid".*

Changes in practice and engagement of NHS and local authority commissioners:

There was significant frustration about the gap between policy and practice in statutory commissioning and the challenges for excellent practice developed in the VCSE sector to get commissioned.

> *"No commissioner is interested in those services because they don't have the money, in their view. It's prevention, and there's no money in prevention…if you think about the government 10-year plan, they're talking about care in the community, taking the people out of a queue into a community space. But the danger is, I sat in a room last Friday with 20 clinicians trying to solve frailty of which 80% of has nothing to do with biology. And they will generate a clinical based regime to solve that because they're all clinicians. That's why the NHS 10-year plan won't work unless they engage".*

3.4.5 MERCERS' SUPPORT FOR ORGANISATIONS

Grantees reported Mercers' support (does or will) help organisations to achieve outcomes relating to their organisation's resilience. Nearly three-quarters (73%, n=74) felt that their organisation was already better connected with other organisations. Over half of grantees reported other organisational benefits that they had already seen including improvements in staff and volunteer skills (59%, n=60), their organisation being better and stronger (56%, n=57) and improved practice (55%, n=56).

Church & Communities grantees were more likely than Older People & Housing grantees to report having already seen benefits to their organisations as illustrated in **Table 10** below.

Table 10: The extent to which the support from Mercers' has contributed to the following areas of impact, by programme area

	Church & Communities				Older People & Housing			
	Already seen	Expected this year	Expected Longer term	Not relevant to grant	Already seen	Expected this year	Expected Longer term	Not relevant to grant
Our org is better connected with other orgs	79%	13%	6%	3%	57%	20%	10%	13%
Our org is stronger and better in other ways	64%	7%	11%	18%	37%	13%	3%	47%
Staff and/or volunteers skills are increased	63%	19%	4%	14%	50%	27%	7%	17%
Practice is better in our organisation	61%	15%	8%	15%	40%	30%	7%	23%
Leadership is better in our organisation	50%	10%	10%	31%	37%	20%	3%	40%

Base = C&C n=73 OP&H n=29 - online survey '25.

There were a few areas in which grantees felt that Mercers' could provide more support, most noticeably by providing:

- Specialist targeted help and support related to their organisation's resilience (48%).
- Keeping them informed about funding priorities and new funding opportunities (44%).
- Support with evaluation and communicating value (42%).
- Business planning (40%).
- Mentoring (40%).

However, grantees felt that Mercers' already provided adequate support in relation to developing a trusted relationship with them (93%), offering multi-year funding (90%), opportunities to network/build partnerships (59%) and webinars (55%). Church & Communities grantees generally felt that Mercers' could provide more support around a number of areas compared to Older People & Housing grantees.

Supporting comments provided via the survey highlight some grantees lacked awareness of the additional support Mercers' offered, whilst others suggested a lack of time was hindering them from taking up Mercers' support.

"I wasn't aware that Mercers' offer some of these activities… We would welcome support with evaluation and communication in particular"

"It's not always that Mercers' are not providing the support but more that we don't have sufficient time to take up that support".

At interview organisations that had received contribution to core costs or a key salary from Mercers' were clear that this was a powerful contribution to their resilience, particularly in smaller organisations.

"Coming out of the pandemic, I think we were really quite full of vision as to what it is that we wanted to do, some quite ambitious projects that we wanted to launch. And we were very successful with that, acquiring a new building, launching some new projects. But whilst all these projects were expanding, it was still just me as the manager, as the leader, and I was beginning to find it almost impossible. I was being pulled in lots of directions. So actually, the big benefit was it gave us the confidence in growing that leadership team because we had that extra unrestricted core cost that could help pay for some of those positions".

"It came at a time of significant change and has played a key role in helping us restructure our services, retain staff, and plan for a more sustainable future"

In some cases, it has created space for the CEO to develop links with statutory partners to influence service provision. "We were able to use the outcome data to inform NHS services and we've as a result have a few conversations with different GP surgeries that come forward and said, and we'd like to think about how we do this".

The fact that grants were multi-year contributions was also important for resilience, contributing to better long-term planning, stability for service users, better evaluation, staff retention, and job satisfaction. "Support from The Cranfield Trust was very much valued, as was the opportunity to meet other funded projects at events".

Mercers' flexible approach and openness to changing the focus of the grant if circumstances changed was seen as a valuable contribution to resilience.

"I feel that Mercers' are a champion of our work – and have been our core funder for this piece of work – they have been particularly receptive when we wanted to explore shifting our budget allocation to increase staffing resource – especially since we were aligned on the outcome being even better-quality experience for our beneficiaries. In terms of offering sustainability to a front-line programme they have been core."

3.4.6 OTHER CHALLENGES FACED

Most grantees that responded to the survey reported having faced challenges in the delivery of their grant – only two didn't report any. The majority highlighted more people needing support (86%, n=88) and supporting individuals with greater or more complex levels of need (84%, n=86). See **Table 11.**

"We are seeing significantly more people in need of our services and people facing more complex problems. This is stretching our available resources, particularly staff time".

Funding cuts to other organisations that support their participants (59%, n=60) and a lack of funding (56%, n=57) were also mentioned as key challenges by over half of grantees – as already highlighted as a key issue in section **3.4.1 above.**

Staffing was a challenge for some organisations. Over a quarter (27%, n=28) said that they found it difficult to find and retain paid staff with the right skills and experience and around 3 in 10 (29%, n=30) stated that this was also a challenge in finding and retaining volunteers.

"We have had challenges recruiting and retaining skilled staff. For front line, we have changed our recruitment policies in favour of maturity and life experience, alongside training to better deal with the very complex needs of clients".

Church & Communities grantees were more likely to report challenges with referral routes to signpost to (47% vs. 17% of Older People & Housing grantees), coming to the end of the grant/support (52% vs. 17% of Older People & Housing grantees) and more people needing support (88% vs. 73% of Older People & Housing grantees).

Whereas Older People & Housing grantees were more likely to have faced challenges with lack of funding (60% vs. 53% of Church & Communities grantees) and funding cuts to other organisations that support their participants (63% vs. 56% of Church & Communities grantees).

Table 11: Challenges faced by grantees (by programme area)

	Overall	Church & Communities	Older People & Housing
More people need support	86%	88%	73%
People have greater levels and/or complexities of need	84%	86%	83%
Funding cuts to other organisations that support our participants	59%	56%	63%
Lack of funding	56%	53%	60%
Shortage of referral routes / other organisations to signpost people to	45%	47%	47%
Negative and judgemental attitudes towards the people we support	42%	44%	47%
Coming to the end of the grant / support	38%	52%	17%
Changes to government policies	34%	33%	37%
Finding / retaining volunteers with the right skills, experience and / or time	29%	27%	33%
Over reliance on particular funders	28%	27%	30%
Finding / retaining paid staff with the right skills and experience	28%	27%	27%
Lack of physical resources and / or facilities (e.g. premises / meeting space)	24%	23%	23%
Lack of time to dedicate to the project	14%	14%	13%
Important partners are missing from our multi-agency work	9%	11%	3%
Other	5%	7%	0%

Base = C&C n=73 OP&H n=30 - online survey '25. Multiple response.

In line with survey findings, at interview grantees reported that demand for services and complexity of need were the biggest challenges.

"The increase in number of people and the increase in complexity of need of our members and new referrals have been a real challenge for the team, the time needed to support complex issues and the number of referrals to social care".

"The NHS gets more and more stretched, mental health services have a longer and longer waiting list. The voluntary sector is there to act as the fourth emergency service with no additional funding and we adapt and we do, and we find a way to make it do. But that does add additional pressure on us".

Projects repeatedly reported people presenting with more complex needs. "People that we work with are sometimes very vulnerable. They could be an element of chaos sometimes, or caring responsibilities, or need to go to work when we've planned something because if they don't go, they will lose their work".

"Alcohol, mental health, poverty, they're all connected"

"When (the advisor) is dealing with poverty, it's like, if they need benefits or they haven't got enough food in the cupboard, there's all the other issues behind it that'll come up. So she has to spend lots of time. You can't just do a quick in and out. She's visiting a 90 year old woman today, that's left on her own. I mean, what would happen?"

Organisations face the challenge of how best to deploy resources to balance the support they provide with supporting as many people as possible and reaching the most vulnerable people. "We can't solve all problems, and we don't have the capacity to put so much energy into one person when there's a lot of other people who need help".

Workload and staffing:

Organisations reported being overstretched with heavy workload, and the challenge of juggling multiple priorities. The complexity and strain of trying to be both operational and strategic in a small organisation really came through with staff going *"over and above what's in the job description"*.

Continuity was an issue, tied to insecure or short-term funding and sometimes to pay differentials in the sector *"Staffing in London is a real issue, because it's so expensive to live here, like why would you be an advice worker here"*.

Some organisations reported difficulty in recruiting enough volunteers and appropriately diverse volunteers: *"The biggest stumbling block is having plenty of volunteers to meet the needs of the service. Norfolk is a vast area, and it's a very rural area… if somebody lives in a remote area and, you know, befrienders who, maybe, do not drive, things like that".*

External factors:

Policy: Some grantees reported specific policy-related challenges that were having significant impact on their work. These included changes to farming subsidy schemes and inheritance tax as major concerns in the farming community. Digital poverty and the requirement to use online portals to get access to support services were also concerns.

Some grantees reported perception and prejudice as challenges.

> *"The perception of older people. A group of students on placement, what they all say is I had absolutely no idea these problems are out there in society. Every single one of them… 'I did not realise that there was this level of loneliness. I didn't realise this older person had mental health problems. I didn't think older people had mental health problems'… because of the media you just assume everyone has experience and you get older and everything's fine".*

3.5 WELLBEING FUND

Church & Communities programme grantees have the option to apply for additional funding up to the value of £5,000 for **Wellbeing Support** for staff and volunteers working within the organisations being funded.

Almost two thirds (65%) of Church & Communities programme grantees currently being funded have been awarded wellbeing funding.

The majority of grantees surveyed (64% n=32) had used Wellbeing Support funding for away days/team building sessions. A further 42% (n=21) had used it for celebration and recognition and a similar number for building skills (40%, n=20). **Figure 4** highlights the various ways in which the Wellbeing Funding is being used.

Figure 4: How Wellbeing Support for staff is used by grantees

Base = C&C n=50 (grantees who had received Wellbeing Support Funding) online survey '25

Front line staff were most likely to be benefitting from the Wellbeing Support fund (98%, n=49). However, many of the grantees receiving this grant also reported that management (72%, n=36) and volunteers (64%, n=35) were also project participants.

Grantees valued the Wellbeing Support grant. Over three-quarters (76%, n=38) thought it had been very beneficial in supporting staff in the organisation and a further four grantees thought that it had been quite beneficial. Only one commented that it had been not at all beneficial and the remaining seven grantees were unable to comment or felt it was too early to tell. Respondents were encouraged to provide supporting comments. A number provided further details on how the grant had been spent and how beneficial it had been. Mercers' was also praised for offering something unique and valuable.

"The Mercers' Company might be the only funder (at least amongst those we came across in the past) who includes this type of funding on top of the main grant request. It was invaluable".

At interview the ways in which organisations used the wellbeing grant divided into 4 main categories: team building and training, wellbeing support for individuals, supporting and celebrating volunteers, and gestures of gratitude.

Examples of team building and training included first aid and project management training, a strategic workshop, day and residential retreats.

"I got to know some of the staff better just from having that time away - 2-3 days with them, to all just get together and we did some fun teambuilding games."

"The Wellbeing Support grant has been very beneficial in supporting staff morale and resilience during a time of significant pressure and change."

"We are using it for trauma-informed and resilience building workshops, underpinned with reflective practice."

Wellbeing support for individuals ranged from formal structured reflection sessions, to supporting mental health, to more fun 'time out' activities:

"This fund helped us allow staff to have a wellbeing day in addition to their annual leave. We are a term time only organisation, this helps staff, so that they can have a day off during the term."

"We have made it compulsory for every member of the volunteer team who is forward facing, anyone who does casework, who answers the helpline, to have two well-being sessions with a counsellor a year, whether, how they do it, is up to them… I suppose we're encouraging them to be reflective in their practice. …so ultimately it should improve their practice. It should improve their resilience and well-being as volunteers, but it's also us giving them something back."

"Each member of staff has an individual budget of £15 a term to choose what they spend it on. Anything that can help their wellbeing or give them rest and recuperation (birdwatching, pottery, walk and lunch)."

Supporting and celebrating volunteers

The additional wellbeing funding enabled organisations to better support and appreciate volunteers:

"Before the Mercers' grant, we weren't doing those things for volunteers across the board. So it's supported us in going, right, what should we be doing? And then bringing those things to the forefront for the volunteers"

"A lot of our volunteers and team are working directly with clients and we work with vulnerable people, we work with people who've got a lot going on, and it's very easy to have that transfer of what's going on for people, to take it home"

Celebration events included building Lego in the café, pie & peas night, and a quiz.

Gestures of gratitude

Some organisations used some of the budget to make small thank you gestures. These included 'Fun for a fiver' ideas, a Self-Care week – each day a little surprise left on desks and a fruit bowl in the kitchen for everyone to help themselves to a selection of fruit each day.

'We get little gifts from time to time from the guys in the office for wellbeing purposes and to show their appreciation for staff and volunteers"

3.6 WORKING WITH MERCERS' AND THE FUTURE

3.6.1 EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH MERCERS'

The majority of grantees surveyed described their experience of working with Mercers' so far as being excellent (94%, n=93) and the remaining 6% felt their experience was good. Further supporting comments provided within the survey highlighted how grantees valued their Grants Managers – the relational approach, their support, knowledge, and expertise, with several mentioning how much they appreciated the visit they had from Mercers' and Trustees allowing them to better understand their work.

A relational funder, trusting and respectful

In line with the survey findings, interviewees were extremely positive about the relational approach. They value the positive, supportive, and relationship-based experience of working with Mercers'. They appreciated having a visit from a grant manager at the outset and having a person they can contact to discuss any issues they are having.

> *"I truly believe our work is understood and support provided based on that understanding. I get the sense of an investment in us that is not transactional"*
>
> *"We have a great relationship with our funding manager. We have built on that relationship through sharing knowledge and being open in how we work"*
>
> *"I would describe Mercers' as one of our "warmest" funders – Upon arrival at the organisation I had a named contact, who knew about our work and what we do, and champions our work – suggesting visits and opportunities"*

A thoughtful and sophisticated funder

> *"What I really like about Mercers' is them doing this. Other funders might do it. But to do this kind of level of dive into resilience issues and what's happening and all that kind of stuff. I mean, it's therapeutic for me, apart from anything! And I like the fact that if the funding organisations are understanding these kinds of things, if they're getting that deep into the fine of what's happening and what's going on and they're using that to inform how they then provide funding, all that kind of stuff. makes for a much, much more sophisticated funder."*

Monitoring and evaluation

Organisations appreciated the flexible and proportionate approach to monitoring and evaluation, that grants were not micro-managed, and that managers were interested in softer outcomes

> *"I've seen 'hit the target, miss the point funding' and I absolutely loathe it… we come from a very different value base. And I get the sense that the Mercers' are also very much on that about depth of impact, not just the numbers."*

> *"Mercers' are a very hands-off funder, they're like, right, this is what you said you're going to do. Go and do it creatively. Tell us about how successful you've been"*
>
> *"The reporting structure is really straightforward. We are using the systems they've got - they are very straight forward. But they are also asking a proportionate amount from us… we sometimes find from others funders it can be disproportionate"*
>
> *"They trust us to get on with it and they are also very flexible, because when we were given the money, we thought it would run one way but then when we got started, we were like we can't do that but they were always understanding and allowed us to adapt"*

Meeting trustees and other funded organisations

Organisations were positive about opportunities to meet other Mercers' grantees and meet Trustees.

> *"The level of communication, engagement and support is high. I particularly like the way you bring the organisations you fund together. There is always so much we can learn from each other"*
>
> *"Last year we went, to a networking event, which was also really good because then we could meet the trustees and have a conversation with them. There was a presentation about how Mercers' uses its investment power to generate income for their activities, which was helpful to also understand as well. Where does the money come from. If we could have even more contact, I think we would really appreciate it"*

3.6.2 BENEFITS OF MERCER'S GRANT

Over two-thirds of grantees said their project would have still gone ahead without the funding from Mercers', however most reported it would have had limited reach and/or impact (66%, n=65) and 3% (n=3) would have sought funding from elsewhere. Around a fifth (18%, n=18) said their project would not have gone ahead if they had not received the Mercers' grant.

Church & Communities and Older People & Housing grantees offered similar views on the likely effect on their project if they had not received a grant from Mercers' (**Table 12**).

Table 12: Likely effect on projects - if they had not received a grant from Mercers' (by programme area)

	Church & Communities		Older People & Housing	
	No.	%	No.	%
It would not have gone ahead at all	12	17%	6	21%
It would have gone ahead with limited reach and/or impact	45	64%	20	69%
It would still have gone ahead with funding from somewhere else	2	3%	1	3%
Unsure	6	9%	-	-
Other	5	7%	2	7%

Base = C&C n=70 OP&H n=29 - online survey '25.

At interview organisations reflected that Mercers' had offered valuable funding, for those receiving core funding the unrestricted nature and funding period were especially important features.

"It's been a lifeline. There's no two ways about it. I think if not for Mercers', we'd have probably lost the project"

"Unrestricted funding is a real blessing"

"And it's an unrestricted grant...That kind of income now more than ever, is like amazing to receive, because that trust that's put in charities to know what they're doing, and to spend the money wisely is really valuable"

"Core funding is particularly valuable to us. It pays for the very dull essentials that many funders do not want to pay for, but which we can't function without (insurance, cleaning, electricity, photocopiers, toilet paper, Directors...)"

Sustaining the projects after the grant

Organisations offered a range of responses from "the project won't continue without further funding" to variations on a stage two refined and revised project based on learning from the first:

"We hope to separate out the operational and strategic roles better. Then would need fewer hours for the manager and could focus on service development, the other person could concentrate on operations and building up events and hires that make money."

"We'll reapply at a reduced level, moving towards sustainability, not just the same again".

3.6.3 EXTENT TO WHICH MERCERS' HAS HELPED LEVER MORE FUNDING

Half of all grantees (50% n=53) who submitted annual / progress reports said their Mercers' grant had helped them to lever more funding. A higher proportion of Church & Communities grantees (56%, n=44) reported having levered funding as a result of Mercers' grant than Older People & Housing grantees (33%, n=9). The approximate amount of additional funding ranged from £6,000 - £1 million.

Table 13: Approximate amount of additional funding levered (overall and by programme area)

	Overall	Church & Communities	Older People & Housing
Average amount of additional funding levered	£103,606	£74,618	£75,351
Median amount of additional funding levered	£42,422	£23,472	£39,000
Minimum amount of additional funding levered	£6,000	£9,000	£6,000
Maximum amount of additional funding levered	£1 million	£1 million	£387,000

Base: Overall n=50, C&C n= 41, OP&H n=9 - Mercers' 'report' monitoring data '25

Those receiving core funding reported that they had more staff resource and time to develop a strategic approach, new funding bids and develop partnerships.

"We were able to put an application for core funding which means that the funding is used to support all of our services across the board. And we've developed two new projects on the back of it. So, the projects aren't funded by Mercers', but without the core-funding from Mercers', we wouldn't have had the capacity to do the research and development and trial these new projects"

"Core funding is so valuable, it allows you to connect into other service providers, it allows you to do that strategic work that means that you have those meaningful partnerships, so that you can deliver, you can engage, you can influence service design. But it also means that you can, you know, develop new things, try new things...respond to identified needs."

Some grantees felt strongly that the support of a national funder for a local project added substantial credibility and encourages other funders to support them.

"Your funding gives credibility. I think there's just a kind of domino effect"

"The Mercers' grant has been pivotal, enabling the launch and growth of the service, supporting staff and volunteer wellbeing, and helping lever additional local funding!"

"The Mercers' money also allows us to evidence the need and gives us the platform to argue the case"

Ideas for improvement

There were 2 suggestions for improving the way Mercers' works:

Mercers' Grant Managers conduct ad hoc site visits during the grant period to some projects, but they cannot visit all grantees. Some grantees have requested visits during both the grant and application processes. Consistency in practice, or making clear what grantees should expect, would clarify this.

One thought Mercers' might be able to advocate about the impact or value of the VCSE sector with other funders or local statutory commissioners in areas where they are important local funders.

"How can the trust funder help with the sustainability bit. So, let's just say this all goes great... What can Mercers' do with us to go (to statutory services) 'Come on, we've invested in this as a startup concept but what are you then going to do?" Because there's a lot of influence there, there's stakeholders. There's probably people who Mercers' are connected to. It just amplifies our voice"

"I think the advantage of some trusts is they get to see the scale, not only across the country, but also maybe on a locality level"

3.7 REFLECTIONS AND KEY LEARNING FOR THE GRANTEES

Almost all grantees (95% of survey respondents) felt it was essential or very important to take a learning approach and to continually reflect and improve and, in the interviews, grantees were asked about their learning from the delivery of the work.

Grantees Key Learning

Grantees were asked about their learning from the delivery of the work. Much of the learning related to areas already identified in other parts of this report. Grantees also recognised the **benefits of peer learning and shared reflection**, noting that exchanging experience can help strengthen practice and confidence across organisations.

- Better understanding of **complex and intersectional needs**, and level of needs, especially among groups facing multiple disadvantages.
- **A need to build flexibility, adaptability,** respond to feedback, and adjust delivery models
- The **importance of place** for project delivery - having safe, inclusive community spaces, gardens, and local hubs were seen as vital for building belonging and accessibility.
- **Recognising** and valuing **the organisations strengths** including qualities and distinct skills of staff - including people with lived experience.
- **Importance and contribution of volunteers** particularly the benefits of diverse, skilled and well-supported volunteer teams.
- **Importance of staff wellbeing.**
- **Different approaches to co production** to **involve participants in project design and delivery.**
- Some grantees had improved **technical expertise**, particularly around church buildings, housing, and working with architects, to support asset development and sustainability.

Some specific key learning on project **delivery** included:

- Practicalities of managing and supporting groups.
- Creating inclusive activities that reflect the cultural heritage of all participants.
- Ensuring a "warm goodbye" as well as a warm welcome.
- Recognising the value of wraparound, person-centred, and holistic support for families, carers, and older people.

4. NEXT STEPS FOR THE EVALUATION & LEARNING TEAM

There continues to be lots of learning for the Evaluation Learning Team during this second year, which will be used to help shape subsequent years' methods, approaches and learning focus.

4.1 EVALUATION LEARNING TEAM

In addition to the research and evaluation activity undertaken to date, the Evaluation Learning Team has also created and facilitated opportunities for grantees to connect, share and learn from one another.

In year 2, the team has:

- Delivered an **online learning event** on Organisational Resilience for all grantees in May 2025 (66 people attended). The aim was to share findings from the organisational resilience review, hear from an external speaker, remind grantees of the evaluation approach and launch the survey. It was also an opportunity for grantees to connect and share information and learning with each other
- Produced a **briefing on Organisational Resilience** (deep dive theme)
- Continued to develop the **Learning Space** as an informal online platform for grantees and a place where they can find out more about the evaluation; the team, how they may be involved, upcoming events, and updates on the research findings.
- Facilitated an **in-person learning event** in Darlington in November 2025, bringing together around 20 North East -based grantees with the aim of hearing directly from grants, connecting staff and sharing learning and ideas.
- In line with user feedback - we decided to archive the Slack platform and instead adopt a direct mailing approach with a **newsletter three times a year** designed to direct readers to the Learning Space.

Next year (Evaluation Y3 – 2026) to the intention is to facilitate further opportunities for grantees to connect with one another and share learning through:

- Keeping the **online Learning Space** up to date – posting useful information regularly and signposting grantees to this
- **Interacting with grantees** through the **newsletter and an email list** to encourage them to share information and learn about their work
- Further explore an **evaluation support offer** for grantees
- **Online learning event for all grantees** in Spring '26
- **Hold an in-person learning event for grantees** in Norfolk / Lincs in Nov '26
- Facilitate **opportunities for grantees to connect** and develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial through online platform(s) and events hosted by the Evaluation Learning Team, in partnership with Mercers'. Building on common areas of interest and /or key challenges e.g. co-production, use of volunteers, infrastructure support.

4.2 FEEDBACK ON THE EVALUATION LEARNING TEAM ROLE

Grantees were asked **how the Evaluation Learning Team (ELT) could support them** going forward. Most saw value in connecting with others doing similar work to share approaches, good practice, challenges and learning. Some suggested peer support between grantees could be a valuable option.

Grantees expressed an interest in both online and in-person **learning events**, recognising the benefits and limitations of both (e.g. time and travel vs quality of interaction and opportunity to build connections). There was some confusion about whether events were organised by Mercers or the ELT.

Those who had attended the events found them beneficial, described as "fantastic," "useful," and "re-energising" by some. Those who attended the online event focused on organisational resilience said they had valued the shared experience and connection with others and gained practical ideas and inspiration on related topics such as strategic planning, staff wellbeing, funding, and inclusion. Some grantees said they were keen to share their learning and experiences at future events.

"When funders gather their grantees together you can end up having some really useful conversations".

There is a desire for more opportunities to connect with other grantees and engage in **peer learning.** Following the online event in May, a small number said they would value **support with evaluation and monitoring**, helping them to showcase their work and demonstrate their value. Another subset of grantees said they would value being connected to other churches delivering funded work.

At the event, grantees indicated they would value support with **other aspects of organisational development** including leadership, management and governance. The team will reflect on this feedback and incorporate it into planning for year 3.

5. SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

5.1 KEY GRANTEE DATA AND OVERVIEW OF FUNDING AWARDED

Overall, **145 grants** were included in the evaluation in Y2 (2025). **101 were** Church & Communities funded grants and **44 were** Older People & Housing funded grants.

Most were funded **over 3 years** and the average amount funded across both programme areas was slightly higher than in year 1 at £86,000. Most were using the Mercers' grant for project delivery with around 38% using their grant towards core costs.

71% of grantees reported their Mercers' grant made up 10% or less of their organisation's annual turnover and 8% reported their grant made up more than a quarter of their turnover. This was similar across Church & Communities, and Older People & Housing grantees.

Church & Communities grantees mostly supported those living in poverty (78%) and whole families (62%). Older People & Housing grantees supported people aged 50+, often at risk of loneliness and living in poverty, with some focusing on older age groups. The average number of people supported per grant during this current year of funding was 766 (range between 15 and13,223).

5.2 APPROACHES, DELIVERY METHODS AND KEY VALUES

Grantees used a diverse set of community-based, participatory, and capacity-building approaches to tackle social isolation, poverty, and inequality, and to strengthen local resilience. Project delivery models included both work with individuals and group work, with Church & Communities grantees offering more targeted one to one work, and Older People & Housing grantees tending to deliver more group activity.

Activities and approaches used included: place-based community hubs**;** health and wellbeing support**;** food security and poverty alleviation; targeted support for isolated and underrepresented groups; employment and training support; outreach, advocacy, and capacity building: support / befriending for carers; housing and crisis intervention; spaces for reflection and identity**;** creative and cultural engagement.

The most common features of approaches used by grantees were: staff understanding the people they are supporting and their needs; listening to peoples' voices; and building positive relationships with people. Other approaches frequently mentioned were asset or strength-based approaches, person-centred and holistic approaches, and peer support. Some grantees had strong **co-production approaches** in place and others were developing or trying out different approaches or wanted to develop these further.

The approaches used across both programme areas were underpinned by a strong set of **common values** which reflected a strong commitment to community, inclusivity, empowerment, and holistic support.

5.3 OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

All grantees were making, or expected to make, a positive difference to people's lives and many reported they were already achieving multiple outcomes.

Many survey respondents stated their grants were already achieving the outcomes in **Mercers' philanthropy framework,** in terms of improving people's lives (93%) creating a stronger organisation (80%) and contributing to societal change (43%). All believed their grants would improve peoples' lives in the longer term.

Survey results overall showed the **project outcomes most commonly met** were: improvements in people's wellbeing (92%), reduced feelings of loneliness (85%), feeling more connected with each other (85%), and people living in poverty having more support and information (76%). Other key outcomes for participants were gaining skills and opportunities for volunteering or employment and feeling safe and valued.

Most grantees were collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to help demonstrate impact with some reporting challenges in evidencing and reporting their outcomes.

5.4 ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE – DEEP DIVE THEME

Overall, grantees demonstrated positive resilience, but it was clear that they face significant external pressures in sustaining and growing their impact. Most grantees (95%) reported high levels of resilience, feeling capable of adapting to change or unexpected disruptions, with over half reporting improved resilience levels. Key factors supporting resilience included strategic approaches to funding and partnerships, strong leadership, clear mission, effective use of assets, and prioritising staff wellbeing. Challenges reported were the challenging funding environment, increased competition, rising costs, sector instability, and increasingly complex demands on services. Mercers' support, especially through multi-year core funding, has been crucial in enhancing organisational resilience by providing stability, enabling long-term planning, staff retention, and improved partnerships. Grantees value Mercers' for flexibility and targeted assistance, though some desire more support in evaluation, funding awareness, and business planning.

5.5 WELLBEING FUND

Around two-thirds of Church & Communities grantees (65%) have received up to £5,000 in additional Wellbeing Support funding for staff and volunteers. The funding has been used across four main areas: team building/away days, training/skills development, recognition and celebration of staff and volunteers, and individual wellbeing initiatives. These activities helped to strengthen teams, encourage reflection, and acknowledge contributions by staff, volunteers and teams. The funding has benefitted frontline staff, management and volunteers. Three quarters of grantees (76%) found the fund highly beneficial for morale, resilience, and overall wellbeing, seeing it as a valuable and unique feature of Mercers' support.

5.6. WORKING WITH MERCERS' AND THE FUTURE

Grantees' overall experience of working with Mercers' was reported as excellent. They value the positive, supportive, and relationship-based experience. They appreciated having a visit from a grant manager at the outset and having a person they can contact to discuss any issues.

Most project leads found the application and reporting processes straightforward and less arduous compared to some other funders.

The flexibility of the funding, being able to use the funds towards core costs, and the multi-year funding were seen as extremely beneficial for grantees, contributing to sustainability.

The Mercers' grant had helped some grantees lever funding from other sources, with some suggesting it gave other funders confidence and reassurance to invest in them.

Over two-thirds of grantees said their projects would have still gone ahead without the funding from Mercers', however most reported that their project would have had limited reach and/or impact. Around a fifth (18%) said their project would not have gone ahead if they had not received the Mercers' grant.

Most grantees intended to continue their work beyond this current grant. Some had already been re-funded by Mercers' and others intended to apply for continuation funding – an opportunity that was welcomed, given the challenges around the current funding landscape.

5.7 REFLECTIONS AND KEY LEARNING FOR GRANTEES

Grantees recognised the importance of adopting a learning approach, with 95% highlighting continual reflection and improvement as essential. Key lessons learned included a deeper understanding of the complex and intersectional needs faced by participants, the value of safe and inclusive local spaces, and recognising staff strengths and lived experience. Grantees emphasised the crucial role of well-supported, diverse volunteers; prioritising staff wellbeing and team appreciation; and the need for flexibility, adaptability, and effective evaluation. Additional learnings involved co-production with participants, practical skills for group management, fostering cultural inclusivity, and ensuring supportive beginnings and endings for participants. Peer learning and shared reflection were also seen as valuable for building confidence and strengthening practice across organisations.

5.8 POINTS FOR MERCERS' TO CONSIDER

Reflecting on the findings from the evaluation this year, here are some points for Mercers' to consider

- **Highlight the benefits of the Wellbeing Support and roll out to grantees funded** by both Church & Communities and Older People & Housing programmes.
- **Make clear what grantees should expect** from Mercers' (visits from grant managers during the grant, opportunity for Cranfield Trust support, and information on re-applying).
- **Consider the potential for Mercers' to take a 'soft advocacy'** role with other funders or commissioners in a locality.
- Further explore how co-production is used and embedded;
- encourage / support increased use of co-production techniques for grantees and
- consider how to communicate this for future applicants and how it works in assessment
- **Continue with funding of core costs,** allowing grantees flexibility to respond to the changing needs of the people they are supporting, enabling them to be more proactive. Actively promote this at the expression of interest stage of the application process.
- **Continue to offer multi-year funding** for at least 3 years to allow grantees more time to plan and embed their work and provide more stability through increasing opportunities to recruit and retain skilled staff and volunteers and evidence impact.
- **Continue to explore how to support projects with evaluation.**

6. APPENDICES

6.1 ADDITIONAL DATA REPORT (FROM MERCER'S MI DATA)

This analysis includes additional **application data** received from **all 145 grants** included in the evaluation (Y2) and **report data** received from **105 Mercers' grants**.

Table 1: Number of grants by term funded

	No	%
12 months	1	1%
13 months	1	1%
18 months	1	1%
24 months	11	8%
36 months	127	88%
46 months	1	1%
47 months	1	1%
48 months	1	1%
Total	145	

Table 2: DEI mission and purpose

	No
Organisation is focused on disadvantaged communities	17
Organisation is BAME focused	7
Organisation is focused on people who are economically disadvantaged	7
Organisation is deaf or disabled focused	3
Organisation is women focused	3
Organisation is focused on other minority communities	2
Organisation is focused on people who are educationally disadvantaged	1
Organisation is LGBT+ focused	1
Total	41

Table 3: DEI mission and purpose by programme area

	Church & Communities		Older People & Housing	
	No	%	No	%
Organisation is focused on disadvantaged communities	14	44%	3	33%
Organisation is BAME focused	5	16%	2	22%
Organisation is focused on people who are economically disadvantaged	7	22%	-	-
Organisation is deaf or disabled focused	1	3%	2	22%
Organisation is women focused	3	9%	-	-
Organisation is focused on other minority communities	2	6%	-	-
Organisation is focused on people who are educationally disadvantaged	-	-	1	11%
Organisation is LGBT+ focused	-	-	1	11%
Total	**32**		**9**	

Table 4: DEI leadership

	No
Organisation is led by the people it is seeking to serve	14
Other	4
Organisation is women led	6
Organisation is BAME led	5
Older voices are included in decision-making	4
Organisation is LGBT+ led	2
Organisation is deaf or disabled led	1
Prefer not to say	1
Total	**40**

Table 5: DEI leadership by programme area

	Church & Communities		Older People &Housing	
	No	%	No	%
Organisation is led by the people it is seeking to serve	12	38%	2	22%
Other	7	22%	-	
Organisation is women led	5	16%	1	11%
Organisation is BAME led	3	9%	2	22%
Older voices are included in decision-making	3	9%	1	11%
Organisation is LGBT+ led	-	-	2	22%
Organisation is deaf or disabled led	-	-	1	11%
Prefer not to say	1	3%	-	
Total	**31**		**9**	

Table 6: Number of people supported on a regular basis

Base number of grantees = 96	**No**
Total number of people supported on a regular basis	24,334
Average number of people supported on a regular basis	253
Median number of people supported on a regular basis	112
Range of people supported on a regular basis	11 to 2,880

NB: Nine grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have been removed from the analysis.

Table 6b: Number of people supported on a regular basis by programme area

	Church and Communities (n=69)	Older People and Housing (n=27)
Total number of people supported on a regular basis	19,776	4,558
Average number of people supported on a regular basis	287	169
Median number of people supported on a regular basis	125	112
Range of people supported on a regular basis	15 to 2,880	11 to 498

Table 7: Outcomes – Wellbeing improved

Base number of grantees = 90	No
Total number of people for whom wellbeing has improved	26,450
Average number of people for whom wellbeing has improved	294
Median number of people for whom wellbeing has improved	160
Range of people for whom wellbeing has improved	4 to 2,880

NB: 1 outlier has been removed for the purposes of the analysis, which was one project that reported wellbeing had improved for 3,500 individuals. 14 grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have also been removed from the analysis.

Table 7b: Outcomes – Wellbeing improved by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=63)	Older People & Housing (n=27)
Total number of people for whom wellbeing has improved	2,076	6,374
Average number of people for whom wellbeing has improved	319	236
Median number of people for whom wellbeing has improved	163	159
Range of people for whom wellbeing has improved	4 to 2,880	16 to 1,118

Table 8: Outcomes – Feel better connected

Base number of grantees = 89	No
Total number of people who feel better connected	23,243
Average number of people who feel better connected	261
Median number of people who feel better connected	123
Range of people who feel better connected	9 to 2,880

NB: 1 outlier has been removed for the purposes of the analysis, which was one project that reported feeling better connected had improved for 4,000 individuals. 15 grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have also been removed from the analysis.

Table 8b: Outcomes – Feel better connected by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=63)	Older People & Housing (n=26)
Total number of people who feel better connected	17,047	6,196
Average number of people who feel better connected	271	238
Median number of people who feel better connected	125	124
Range of people who feel better connected	9 to 2,880	14 to 1,118

Table 9: Outcomes – Number of people who have found work

Base number of grantees = 45	No
Total number of people who have found work	772
Average number of people who have found work	17
Median number of people who have found work	7
Range of people who have found work	1 to 94

NB: 59 grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have been removed from the analysis.

Table 9b: Outcomes – Number of people who have found work by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=40)	Older People & Housing (n=5)
Total number of people who have found work	710	62
Average number of people who have found work	18	12
Median number of people who have found work	10	2
Range of people who have found work	1 to 94	1 to 55

Table 10: Outcomes – Number of people who have improved their skills

Base number of grantees = 74	No
Total number of people who have improved their skills	10,888
Average number of people who have improved their skills	147
Median number of people who have improved their skills	58
Range of people who have improved their skills	1 to 1,600

NB: 31 grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have been removed from the analysis.

Table 10b: Outcomes – Number of people who have improved their skills by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=58)	Older People & Housing (n=16)
Total number of people who have improved their skills	7,919	2,969
Average number of people who have improved their skills	137	186
Median number of people who have improved their skills	59	58
Range of people who have improved their skills	1 to 1,600	7 to 535

Table 11: Outcomes – Number of leaders who have developed their abilities

Base number of grantees = 76	No
Total number of leaders who have developed their abilities	707
Average number of leaders who have developed their abilities	9
Median number of leaders who have developed their abilities	3
Range of leaders who have developed their abilities	1 to 120

NB: 29 grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have also been removed from the analysis.

Table 11b: Outcomes – Number of leaders who have developed their abilities by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=64)	Older People & Housing (n=12)
Total number of leaders who have developed their abilities	613	94
Average number of leaders who have developed their abilities	10	8
Median number of leaders who have developed their abilities	5	3
Range of leaders who have developed their abilities	1 to 120	1 to 50

Table 12: Outcomes – Number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing

Base number of grantees = 62	No
Total number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	663
Average number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	11
Median number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	5
Range of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	1 to 110

NB: 43 grantees provided a 0/zero return for this question and have also been removed from the analysis.

Table 12b: Outcomes – Number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=52)	Older People & Housing (n=10)
Total number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	571	92
Average number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	11	9
Median number of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	5	3
Range of leaders who have improved their wellbeing	1 to 110	1 to 50

Table 13: Amount of additional funding leveraged (Bandings)

Base number of grantees = 50	Nos	%
Up to £10,000	3	6%
£10,001-£20,000	9	18%
£20,001 - £30,000	7	14%
£30,001 - £50,000	11	22%
£50,001 - £100,000	9	18%
£100,001 - £150,000	2	4%
£150,001 - £300,000	4	8%
Over £300,000	5	10%

Table 13b: Amount of additional funding leveraged (Bandings) by programme area

	Church & Communities (n=41)	Older People & Housing (n=9)
Up to £10,000	5% (2)	11% (1)
£10,001-£20,000	20% (8)	11% (1)
£20,001 - £30,000	12% (5)	22% (2)
£30,001 - £50,000	24% (10)	11% (1)
£50,001 - £100,000	15% (6)	33% (3)
£100,001 - £150,000	5% (2)	
£150,001 - £300,000	12% (5)	
Over £300,000	7% (3)	11% (1)

Table 14: How has our grant enabled your organisation to develop or grow?

Base number of grantees = 103	Nos	%
Developed the skills of staff and/or volunteers	82	80%
Developed new partnerships with organisations	77	75%
Expanded services to reach more people or communities	64	62%
Increased profile	51	50%
Improved financial sustainability	50	50%
Developed new services	50	49%
Developed an evidence base	45	45%
The people in our organisation are more involved in decision-making	42	42%
Expanded services to reach different types of people or communities	41	41%
Improved systems and processes	37	37%
Established systematic monitoring and evaluation	22	22%
Improved communications and marketing	20	20%
Improved governance	14	14%

NB: 2 grantees did not answer this question

Table 14b: How has our grant enabled your organisation to develop or grow? Programme level

	Church & Communities (n=76)	Older People & Housing (n=27)
Developed the skills of staff and/or volunteers	83% (63)	70% (19)
Developed new partnerships with organisations	76% (58)	70% (19)
Expanded services to reach more people or communities	63% (48)	59% (16)
Increased profile	53% (40)	44% (12)
Improved financial sustainability	50% (38)	48% (13)
Developed new services	51% (39)	41% (11)
Developed an evidence base	47% (36)	37% (10)
The people in our organisation are more involved in decision-making	45% (34)	30% (8)
Expanded services to reach different types of people or communities	42% (32)	33% (9)
Improved systems and processes	37% (28)	33% (9)
Established systematic monitoring and evaluation	25% (19)	15% (4)
Improved communications and marketing	22% (17)	11% (3)
Improved governance	17% (13)	4% (1)

Table 15: Has our funding contributed to any wider changes to society?

Base number of grantees =84	Nos	%
Contributed to raising awareness around a particular issue	66	79%
Helped to build an evidence base	42	50%
Influenced local or national government policy	16	19%
Influenced a change in practice beyond your own organisation	30	36%

NB: 21 grantees did not answer this question

Table 15b: Has our funding contributed to any wider changes to society? Programme level

	Church &Communities (n=65)	Older People &Housing (n=19)
Contributed to raising awareness around a particular issue	80% (52)	74% (14)
Helped to build an evidence base	54% (35)	42% (8)
Influenced local or national government policy	18% (12)	21% (4)
Influenced a change in practice beyond your own organisation	40% (26)	21% (4)

Table 16: Progress against outcomes[8]

Base number of grants =91	Outcome 1 Base = 91	Outcome 2 Base = 91	Outcome 3 Base = 91
Exceeded	18% (n=16)	16% (n=15)	12% (n=11)
Fully met	55% (n=50)	54% (n=49)	45% (n=41)
Partially met	27% (n=25)	29% (n=26)	35% (n=32)
Not met	-	1% (n=1)	8% (n=7)

8 Tables 16a,16b and 16c: The majority of grantees define only 3 outcomes, which we have shown.

Table 16b: Progress against outcomes – Church & Communities

Base number of grantees =76	Outcome 1 Base = 76	Outcome 2 Base = 76	Outcome 3 Base = 76
Exceeded	18% (n=14)	20% (n=15)	13% (n=10)
Fully met	53% (n=40)	51% (n=39)	46% (n=35)
Partially met	29% (n=22)	29% (n=)22	34% (n=26)
Not met	-	-	7% (n=5)

Table 16c: Progress against outcomes – Older People & Housing[9]

Base number of grantees =15	Outcome 1 Base = 15	Outcome 2 Base = 15	Outcome 3 Base = 15
Exceeded	13% (n=2)	-	7% (n=1)
Fully met	67% (n=10)	67% (n=10)	40% (n=6)
Partially met	20% (n=3)	27% (n=4)	40% (n=6)
Not met	-	7% (n=1)	14% (n=2)

9 Older People & Housing grantees were only required to report on outcomes data from Jan 2024 and so data for some grantees on outcomes may be unavailable.

Table 17: How has your grant improved people's lives?

Base number of grantees =103	Nos	%
Improving people's wellbeing	101	98%
Developing people's skills	73	72%
Supporting people into employment	41	40%

NB: 2 grantees did not answer this question

Table 17b: How has your grant improved people's lives? Programme level

	Church &Communities (n=76)	Older People &Housing (n=27)
Improving people's wellbeing	99% (n=75)	96% (n=26)
Developing people's skills	80% (n=61)	44% (n=12)
Supporting people into employment	53% (n=40)	4% (n=1)

The Mercers' Company
6 Frederick's Place,
London EC2R 8AB
020 7776 7200