

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



Executive Summary (2025)

Evaluators

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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

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 beneficiaries 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.

Working with Mercers'

Grantees' highly rated their experience of working with Mercers and valued the positive and supportive relationship with grant managers. 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.

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.

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