



Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire

RESEARCH REPORT ON THE IMPACT COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE VCSE

1. Introduction

The COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown triggered a fast response from the VCSE in terms of finding ways to both get through the situation and in a number of cases find new ways of supporting the beneficiaries of the sector, including meeting unprecedented new needs within communities. However for others there was no other option than to close down which created major threats to the sustainability of significant areas of community action.

VANL was no different, including like others loss of most of our unrestricted income.

We needed to re-group, find new ways of working and meet new needs in the face of lack of financial, technical and staff capacity.

It became very clear, very quickly that we needed to find out what the situation was with our sector in order to present clear evidence based intelligence on the impact of the pandemic and lock down on the sector, in order to raise awareness of the major threat to our society if support for the sector to survive was not forthcoming. The outcome was that VANL mobilised all staff to carry out initial telephone interviews with VANL members.

VANL applied to the National Emergencies Trust via Lincolnshire Community Foundation and was successful to continue the research.

1.1 Aim of the Research

To enable extra staff capacity to continue to map the impact and needs within the sector over a 6-month period, providing extra communications capacity which helped VANL to keep the sector engaged in the research and the sector informed of guidance, funding and volunteering opportunities on a daily basis.

1.2 How the Data would be used

The data collected was used throughout the 6-months to update statutory and governmental agencies nationally, at STP/Humber level, and locally. It has also been shared with VCSE organisations and outcomes reported at a number of multi agency partnerships.

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2. Research Methodology

2.1 Stage 1 – VANL initial research April -May

A telephone interview was conducted with members asking the following questions:

How are things going?

Can we help?

Any new Demands?

Checking organisational contact details.

Stage 2 (following NET award) – May –October

NET/Lincolnshire Community Foundation was measuring the impact of COVID19 on communities across the Greater Lincolnshire Area; to inform the national and greater Lincolnshire emergency planning and therefore needed specific nationally quantifiable data. VANL added our local/organisational information needs to this research to ensure we were offering support and campaigning for the sector according to the local situation.

The research moved mainly to electronic means using survey monkey, promoted via our facebook site and in weekly email communications with nearly 315 VCSE organisations who had provided email contacts. This was supplemented by telephone contacts when the opportunity arose (groups/organisations contacting us for support).

Net areas of enquiry:

- Stopped trading or closed
- Have paused trading
- Have furloughed staff
- Have changed their delivery model or offer
- Have continued as previously
- Are new organisations.

Respondent organisations legal status was collected and outcomes of VANL's support as reported by the respondent was also collected and reported.

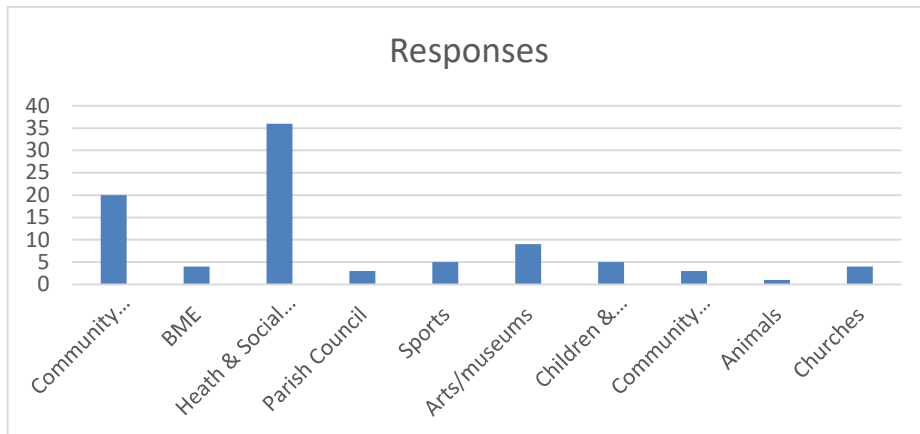
VANL supplementary questions

- Have you benefitted from COVID funding?
- Has this helped you in overcoming immediate issues e.g. loss of income, becoming COVID secure, remote working?
- Where did you get the funding from?
- Did VANL help? If so how?
- What do you think the long-term impact is for your organisation?
- Have you fully reopened? If you haven't reopened when do you plan to?
- What issues do you face now and into the future?
- How can VANL help.

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3. Results:

a. Respondents:



Breakdown of the type of organisations that responded

N.B. organisations may fall into more than 1 category.

There were 71 responses in total plus 10 additional members of the Alliance, so a total of 81.

9 responded more than once over the 6 month period.

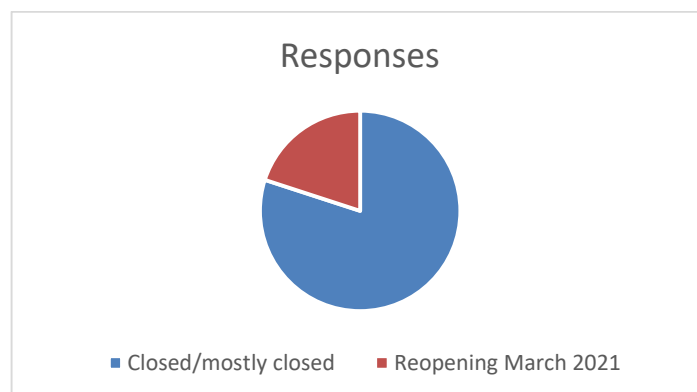
Legal status:

66 Charities and the remaining being Parish Council's or Social Enterprise/CIC's.

b. operational status

Up to the end of June; 27 organisations responding to this question were 100% closed, 1 90% closed, 11 were partially open, 15 fully open, but operating with different delivery model.

Most organisations had furloughed all or some staff.



During July to September 12 respondents said they were closed or mostly closed, 3 said they are not reopening until at least March next year. From the small number of respondents in October none had completed this section, which we assume relates to them being open again.

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The groups that remain closed are the small community groups which are often serving very vulnerable people and are also run by the same sections of the community.

c. VANL Research questions – results:

FUNDING

11 organisations told us they had received Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grant/s (some in multiple/cross boundary applications) the majority cited support from VANL in knowing about the opportunity and/or support to apply.

1 said Early Years Foundation Stage funding continuing at the pre-Covid level helped, 1 cited rates relief, 2 discretionary grant.

6 said they had received a NET grant and 1 National Lottery Covid Fund and 1 Lloyds TSB Foundation Trust.

5 organisations received funding from Sport England via Active Humber.

We know that organisations have been using both the furlough and flexi-furlough as we have provided support to make the claims through our payroll service.

All organisations funded said it was a lifeline and helped to meet the extra demand as well as ensuring the organisations did not need to close - in the short to medium term at least, with most stating that if things don't improve they will be in the same position again within a short timeframe.

4. Issues moving forward:

Over 90% respondents cited funding as the main issue e.g. funding streams being redirected, suspended fundraising/lack of fundraising opportunities, lack of grant funding to sustain and grow activities.

1 organisation said it has stretched to meet the needs left by the closure of other community groups and this in creating an unsustainable burden on the organisation. They report the closure is mainly a result of the age and vulnerability of community volunteers.

4 others were starting or part way through bids for service continuation or capital works pre-COVID when the funding was diverted into COVID related support , resulting in severe issues threatening the resilience and sustainability of those organisations.

This situation seems set to continue in the short to medium term at least and applies to most of the principal VCSE funding streams. The COVID related funding streams are almost all short-term and don't allow for planning for sustainability.

The situation is compounded for North Lincolnshire as very few service delivery organisation receive any local 'core funding'*, and have not done so for many years, which means they are very

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dependent on earned income/trading or fundraising; resulting in increased vulnerability as this type of income has been badly hit by the pandemic. In addition any reserves have been eroded as a result of the absence of any core funding.

I believe the threat to our communities and vulnerable people, resulting from the fragility of the sector is critical.

4.1 Other issues raised:

- End of the furlough scheme (now reinstated for the period of lockdown 2)
- Loss of volunteers due to lengthy closure as people lose interest, or find other interests.
- Loss of members through reduced connection, increased poverty, unemployment.
- Fear that the Barton line will close permanently due to reduced passenger numbers as a result of COVID

4.2 How has VANL helped?

Most respondents said assistance in finding financial/funding opportunities and practical support and guidance to submit applications was highly valued.

Frequent and up to date guidance and support via newsletters and facebook, including re-opening guidance.

4.3 Other Comments received from respondents:

'VANL has always performed well, even after loss of funding'

'Thank you for your assistance it is very much appreciated'

'Need (VANL) Volunteer Centre reinstating' (VANL has a Volunteering Advisor as a result of National Lottery COVID funding now and the Local Authority has funded the Alliance via Humber and Wolds Rural Action to create a volunteering Hub)

'Thank you for lobbying on behalf of the voluntary sector, I hope it bears fruit'.

'If you had not told me how to submit the paperwork (discretionary grant) I would have given up.'

5. Moving forward – requests

Need for training to safely reopen and also consistent information and advice on all aspects of running a Charity, including health and safety and becoming COVID secure and volunteers to replace those lost over the period of closure.

Other Training:

The most popular requests are Social Media and online meeting platforms

Health and Safety

Funding and bid writing

5.1 'You asked we did'

All of the above requests are being actioned with 1 Health and Safety Course completed and other training sessions organised.

A Community Development and Funding Advisor is in post funded by the National Lottery Reaching Communities COVID Fund until March 2021.

Part-time Volunteer Advisor post created funded by the National Lottery Reaching Communities COVID Fund until March 2021.

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Part-time VCSE Communications and Research post created funded by NET/Lincolnshire Community Foundation (now ended)

All services operational (until Lock down 2 and we will need to close our DBS service again)!

We would like to thank the funders who have helped us to respond to the unprecedented threats to the VCSE, our beneficiaries and our communities:

National Lottery Reaching Communities COVID Fund

National Emergencies Trust/Lincolnshire Community Foundation

North Lincolnshire Council Business Support Team

Lloyds TSB COVID fund

Scunthorpe Rotary Club

We would also like to thank our partners who have listened and responded, particularly North Lincolnshire Council and special thanks to the Business Support Team who went the extra mile and then some to support our sector.

And most of all I would like to thank our voluntary organisations, including VCSE Alliance partners who have worked so hard to sustain their organisations and in many cases not only meet the changing and escalating needs of their beneficiaries, but also taken on new work to ensure we get through this together.

And last but certainly not least VANL Staff Team, Volunteers and Board, without whom none of this would have happened. They certainly pulled out all the stops!

Carole Phillips - 3 November 2020

***Core funding is funding** that can be spent on an organisation's **core** functions, for example management, finance salaries, communications, operations, governance, income generation, or other spending that is not project-specific

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