

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Pandemic Impact Survey 2022



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Children in Scotland and YouthLink Scotland

1: The backdrop

The Cross Party Group on Children and Young People (CPG) met on Monday 6th December 2021 to discuss the ongoing challenges posed by Covid-19 to children, young people, their families and the organisations that support them. The CPG has taken a keen interest in this topic over the past 18 months with three separate meetings, including with Scottish Government Ministers and COSLA.

We have been aware across these meetings of the impact of the pandemic on children, young people and their families and have been keen to explore this more. We used the findings from our December meeting on the current challenges people are facing to develop a survey to find out more.

The CPG was keen to hear from as many organisations as possible about the current impact of the ongoing pandemic on service delivery and on children, young people and families. We also wanted to get a sense of continued and systemic challenges that could undermine the delivery of services now and in the future.

The survey was designed to inform the policy discussions around current needs and recovery. We are also keenly aware of the challenges both national and local government have faced and hope to add to their evidence base. The responses in the headline report will be shared with Scottish Government, MSPs, COSLA and shared with members of the CPG on Children and Young People.

The survey was carried out from 16/12/21 to 21/1/22 and was shared widely with CPG members and their networks. Questions in the survey are both quantitative and qualitative. Submissions were self-selecting and a range of targeted outreach was undertaken.

The responses to the survey are confidential and anonymised and all personal data is stored in line with the privacy policies of YouthLink Scotland and Children in Scotland.

We have presented an initial executive summary of the key findings and then all the key data from the responses. We have not conducted detailed analysis of the findings as this headline report is intended to provide additional evidence of issues faced by the sector.

2: The results – summary

The survey results continue to show a concerning situation for organisations working with children and young people, and their ability to provide services and support. The responses are from a range of organisations from early years through to youth and employability, and show continuing barriers and highlight systemic weaknesses in the current policy landscape.

The findings show that over **90%** of organisations are facing 'some' or 'significant' barriers to delivering their services and suggest that the future viability of some services is under threat. They also show that the negative impact on children and young people's mental health is particularly stark and this is having an effect on the development of children and young people. The impact on health and wellbeing is still continuing to emerge as we come through the pandemic.

48% of respondents indicated that they are uncertain about the future of their organisation and **74%** are struggling with staff capacity to deliver services, with many saying that increased demand is a major reason for this pressure. It is concerning that **35%** are still citing digital inclusion as an issue.

The impact on children, young people and their families comes through very strongly; **86%** report negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing and **56%** say they are seeing increasing levels of inequality. **49%** of organisations are also reporting longer waiting times.

A further concerning trend is the impact on staff morale, with **72%** saying this has had a negative impact. **42%** have seen a drop off in participation, impacting on vital face-to-face support. **36%** of organisations have seen a drop in volunteer numbers.

Lack of access to appropriate facilities has left many organisations still experiencing barriers to the facilities they need to deliver services - this is despite restrictions being lifted. Of those who wanted access to Local Authority facilities, **43%** said they have no access. **34%** of organisations who want access to school facilities have no access.

What is striking from the results is the continued inequality around parity of value between formal education providers and third sector support services, including youth work. While schools have resumed, other vital support services that children and young people rely on in the community have faced barriers to access. This has resulted in the loss of crucial supportive relationships, a drop in participation, longer waiting times and a significant drop off in volunteer numbers.

The survey provides further evidence on the impact of many short-term funding cycles that have become available. For many this has proven extremely beneficial and supported them to continue to deliver essential services. However, the short-term funding cycles have also made it challenging to plan for meaningful, long-term delivery.

It is also clear that staff absences due to the pandemic are affecting the experience of education and support that young people receive and the relationships they have access to.

We know young people are already dealing with the detrimental consequences of the pandemic. The impact on education, development and mental health will only be further exacerbated while the current challenges continue.

3: The results – stats

Responses

118 completed questionnaires

26%
Local Authority
providers

21%
National Third
Sector Providers

53%
Local Third
Sector Providers



All Local Authorities represented
with the exception of Shetland
Islands Council

18 responding organisations are members of the CPG

77 willing to share experience as part of wider work of CPG

3.1 Barriers to Service Provision

- 28% of respondents say they are still facing significant barriers to delivering services
- 66% of respondents say they are still facing some barriers to delivering services

A number of key reasons have been provided as significant barriers to provision. Full details can be found below in Table A. Most prominent among respondents is staff capacity to delivery services; uncertainty about viability of services and uncertainty among children, young people and families about what will happen next. It is also clear that access to facilities and challenges to funding are causing significant issues.

There are also concerns around a lack of opportunities to engage with decision makers and particularly concerns for people with English as an additional language. Language barriers have caused challenges for children, young people and families understanding of guidance and of the support that is available.

Table A - Issues that organisations or children, young people and families are experiencing as a result of the pandemic

Issues being experienced by organisations or children, young people and families as a result of the pandemic	% of responding organisations say this is an issue
Staff capacity to provide services	74%
Uncertainty among children, young people and families about what will happen next	67%
Uncertainty about the viability of services due to the changing situation	60%
Lack of access to facilities	48%
Current levels of funding don't meet the demand	36%
Lack of understanding about the issues children and young people we work with are facing during the pandemic	36%
Digital inclusion - lack of access to devices	35%
Lack of opportunity for children, young people and families we work with to share their views with decision makers	30%
Digital inclusion - lack of access to internet	27%
Cuts to funding	21%
Children, young people and families less able to understand guidance due to language barriers	10%
Children, young people and families less able to understand what support is available due to language barriers	8%

3.2: Impact of these issues on children, young people and families

Our survey highlights that the issues identified above are having a knock-on effect on children and young people themselves. The responses highlight that 86% of organisations are seeing an impact on mental health and 71% seeing an impact on the relationships available to young people. 64% have also seen a negative effect on education and learning (See Table B below).

Table B – Impact of the issues on children, young people and families that use your service

Impact of the issues on children, young people and families that use your service	% of responding organisations reporting this impact
Negative impact on mental health and wellbeing	86%
Fewer opportunities for young people to access supportive relationships	71%
Negative impact on education and learning	64%
Increasing levels of inequality	56%
Longer waiting times for children and young people accessing services	49%
Other	5%

Impact on Children and Young People

Respondents also told us in detail about the impact of the pandemic on the children, young people and families that they work with. Brief sub-headings relating to each are laid out below.

Developmental delays in early years – and more challenging behavioural issues – and not enough staff capacity to address these.

Organisations working with very young children were clear about the impact on the early development of the children they work with. We know how important this is for setting up future learning, development and wellbeing. Capacity to deliver services at the appropriate staff to child ratio's also appears to affect this.

"We have also noticed developmental delays in the children we support. They are more anxious, less willing to engage with a group due to lack of socialisation during the pandemic."

"Our younger children have struggled with the transition to nursery setting. Emotional wellbeing and resilience is not in a good place. Children with additional needs are unable to access services and unable to recruit one-to-one staff that are required."

"We have noticed a real difference in the level of ability...children have had no social interaction at playgroups/toddler groups and they are really struggling with the transition to nursery full time."

"We've noticed an increase in speech and language and behavioural issues with our children. The waiting lists for services to help our children in need are so long."

"Increased number of young people who are presenting with additional support needs/behavioural issues which require one-to-one staff capacity that is not always funded. Lack of additional support impacts on care of individual children and the wider service."

"Children are showing less maturity and are far less ready for entering school this summer than in previous years. Children are more anxious and less self-confident overall than in previous years. Children who require additional support are hardly receiving any. Referrals are taking a ridiculous amount of time to be acted upon."

The impact on young people's health and wellbeing is significant – and still emerging

As discussed previously, the findings show a clear impact on health and wellbeing. We are also still continuing to learn about the impact of the pandemic on this, with organisations feeling we will continue to develop a fuller understanding as time progresses. This also backs up what young people themselves have said over a range of data that has been collected.

"There is a serious lack of optimism and direction regarding what young people say they would like to achieve as they navigate their path to adulthood...Young people repeatedly tell us there are no job prospects, less opportunity for progression and that they feel a bit stuck."

"Mental health among young people is a growing crisis...issues include cyber-bullying and online gambling."

"Young people are more vocal in their fear, worries and needs. Lack of routine, lack of social contact and fear of re-engaging in the world around them mean that young people struggle to engage with what support is available to them. They are also ill-prepared for resuming education or entering the world of work."

"The full impacts of the pandemic are still unfolding. Many young people are still set in a 'coping stance': relationship problems suppressed to get by; losses not yet acknowledged; harmful coping mechanisms becoming habitual; learning delays and disruptions undermining new steps...We see increasing numbers of young people talking about suicidal ideation, as well as self-harm, as a coping mechanism that they prefer to hold on to rather than access support. Disconnectedness with support services, exacerbated by Covid-19 restrictions/disruptions is also concerning."

Face-to-face support is needed more than ever but services are stretched and young people and their families are not consistently getting the support they need

The impact of the pandemic on organisational capacity has left organisations stretched and means many children and young people are not getting the support that they require. Respondents highlighted that they cannot provide continuity of support and also limits on face-to-face can have a negative effect. There is also a feeling that organisations are currently receiving a backlog of referrals to services and some concern about capacity to meet this need.

Ongoing funding issues, a lack of capacity to meet existing need and changes to longer term service delivery plans appear to be exacerbating these issues as the wider package of support is not there for young people.

"[There is a] lack of continuity of care to form positive relationships with young people."

"There has been an increase in youth involvement at youth clubs and activities, but what has been a challenge is recruiting staff. Agree that the perception that our service is not valued or understood with our education partners enough. Lack of face -to-face opportunities to support young people can lead to frustration that we cannot do more to help them, or are restricted in what we can do with further negative challenges around negative impact on work teams and leading to feelings of isolation."

"It is increasingly difficult to link [young people] into appropriate long-term community support when they move on from our support. Cuts to service level agreements means that the support we can provide is now less in terms of both length and intensity."

"Children and their families are unable to access medical support, educational support and emotional support. Partly this is due to the lack of acceptance of the severity and prevalence of Long Covid in children. Partly due to services being stretched too thin in Scotland as the NHS, Local Authorities and schools, and CAMHS services are under huge strain leading to exceptionally long wait times and refusal of services."

"There is a serious lack of mental health support, in particular regarding ACEs and Trauma."

"Our normal referral pathways were severely impacted at the start of the pandemic with referrals slowing to a trickle. Only now are we seeing referrals consistently at pre-pandemic levels. We feel it is likely that there is a pent-up volume of demand which was unmet during the pandemic and are now in the process of discovering if we have the resource to meet that demand."

"Activities to support and improve parenting skills and mental health have at times had to be cancelled if scheduled to run in a community hall...We can offer the same activity using video platforms but families are missing social interactions and practical elements of activity. If we do not support families soon after referral, we have experienced that families become less motivated to receive support and staff find them difficult to engage."

"Digital literacy of families, particularly parents and grandparents, is affecting their ability to attend meetings about the welfare and caring arrangements for children in the hearing system – increasing stress around already stressful decision-making processes."

"Virtual hearings may be creating a power imbalance between decision makers and children / families involved in the services but also potentially between the voices of children and their parents / caregivers/ grandparents etc. within the decision-making process particularly when there are existing issues such as coercive control, violence or acrimony in relationships between family members. There are [many issues around participation for children and families with additional support needs] and anecdotal evidence that virtual attendance at hearings causes distress when individuals are not able to comfort or interact properly."

Young people are being denied opportunities outside the school setting to build skills – for example volunteering and outdoor education

There also appears to be an impact on the opportunities available for young people. Restrictions have meant it is hard for 3rd sector organisations to engage with schools to provide additional outside 'formal' education. Restrictions are also making it harder to bring young people in as volunteers.

"There is high interest in youth volunteering, but a serious lack of opportunities for young people. This has occurred due to various reasons: reduced staff capacity to support volunteers; concerns regarding insurance, risk assessments and safeguarding and also some organisations being unwilling to take young people in settings with vulnerable adults due to Covid risk assessments...This is especially true for under-16s and it is creating a skills and opportunities gap. A positive youth volunteering experience also has positive impacts on education, learning, mental health and wellbeing, close inequality gaps and supports the development of supportive relationships."

"Some children and young people learn in ways other than the formal schools setting...Young people with additional needs need other supportive contexts with outdoor education specialists they can trust... In addition, most young people in Scotland live in (and some are constrained to) urban environments. They need to connect meaningfully to the environment or it will be an irrelevance to them and they will not be minded to take action to save the planet, in whatever form that might take."

Impact on families

Financial issues are the priority for many families – stress levels are high

It is also clear that many families continue to be affected financially. This is particularly concerning given the upcoming increases to the cost of living. Organisations are seeing increasing numbers of families accessing their services and have noticed how worries about money are affecting stress levels and mental health.

"Many families who were not in contact or in need of statutory services before Covid now need support and those families who were already in receipt of support now need extra assistance...family life has become strained and resilience drained or tested to the limit... As an organisation, we received a surge in demand of 415% for parenting advice in the first three months of lockdown."

"Families are focused in the immediate needs of food, shelter and warmth. We have witnessed increased levels of stress...which are resulting in poorer mental health and wellbeing, conflict in the school environment, leading to exclusion or alternative education placements..."

Parents and carers are struggling with their own mental health which makes it harder to offer support to children and young people

Organisations have also reported that as well as an impact on the mental health of children and young people, they are also seeing an increasing impact of the pandemic on the mental health of parents and carers. As we have noted above, there is stress about money and also social isolation. This has a knock on effect to wider family life. It is clear any support must help whole families.

"Parents of young children are socially isolated."

"We have noticed a significant impact on the mental health of carers during the pandemic."

"The families we were working with prior to the pandemic were already often marginalised and struggling to cope and this situation has only deteriorated since March 2020."

"The impact on mental health and wellbeing is affecting whole families...Uncertainty around employment, rising costs and an ever changing list of restrictions has left families with a multitude of issues to resolve."

"The impact on a family is too great. If parents aren't coping...the young people in the family are affected, causing anxiety, fear and feeling helpless."

Appointment-based systems that meet risk assessment requirements don't work well for those most in need

Ongoing restrictions have also affected the ability of services to provide more holistic support. A requirement for appointments has meant a lack of flexibility for families. Organisations reported that this has a particular affect for families with children with disabilities and those who may be facing other challenges relating to mental health.

"We used to offer drop in services which now need to be booked in. For children with complex needs this lack of flexibility can be difficult and as a result children with disabilities and their families are becoming more isolated."

"Chaotic lifestyles and poor mental health do not lend themselves to an 'appointment based' system... people need open and accessible services on their doorsteps."

Impact of these issues on staff and organisations

It is also clear that the issues organisations continue to face are affecting organisations and their staff. In particular there appear to be issues with staff morale, uncertainty about the future of services and a drop in engagement from young people.

Table C - Impact of the issues relating to the pandemic on your organisation and staff

Impact of issues relating to the pandemic on your organisation and staff	% of organisations reporting this impact
Negative impact on staff morale	72%
Uncertainty about the future of our service	48%
A drop in young people's participation	42%
Perception that our services is not valued or understood	39%
A drop in volunteer numbers	36%
Negative impact on staff retention	29%
A reduction in funding	25%
A drop in membership	10%
None of the above	8%

Impact on staff

Recruitment and retention

The findings show there are challenges with recruiting staff, in some cases a lack of capacity is causing services to be suspended or children, young people and families being left without support. Wider factors have also appeared to pull more experienced staff into different roles, leaving less experience in staff teams delivering services. High workloads have also meant organisations have not be able to get volunteers into posts.

"Challenges with staffing requirements, recruitment."

"High turnover of staff as a result of 'perfect storm' - pandemic, personal wellbeing, low pay, reassessing life choices (staff earn more at supermarkets)...consequence is higher proportion of less experienced staff."

"Uncertainty around future funding leading to a lack of capacity has meant we have had to suspend the service in the short term."

"Due to staff shortages we have a waiting list of 50 young people. As a result, this is 50 families who are struggling in their caring roles."

"We have less volunteers in place as we have not had the capacity to be advertising and recruiting for them."

Staff absence

Staff absence due to the pandemic and self-isolation rules are making it hard for organisations to deliver their services, it also means staff teams are feeling burnt out as they provide cover. Schools appear to suggest that this is also having an affect children and young people's enjoyment of their learning experience and impacting on their educational progress.

"Staff shortages in schools having a big impact on students' learning experience and the support offered. Growing dissatisfaction with the education experience."

"Absences of staff impacting on consistency of education leads to young people feeling let down and not succeeding in meeting their goals. This in turn is impacting on mental health and wellbeing."

"We are relying on supply staff to plug gaps due to staff turnover, long term sickness or isolating. When we do get supply it is not providing the secure, consistent environment many of our children need. This is negatively impacting their mental health and their ability to settle...parents are unhappy with their levels of feedback and communication which is breeding anxiety."

"Number of staff self-isolating putting pressure on staff who are feeling burnt out."

Morale

Organisations across the sector have also highlighted that there is an impact on morale. It appears that much of this comes from a feeling of a lack of recognition about the value of their work during the pandemic and also from a lack of funding.

"Early years feel less valued as they don't feel they were recognised by the Scottish Government as offering an 'essential service.'"

"Staff don't feel valued. The perception of social care work as being low skill needs to be challenged and changed."

"Higher hourly rates are being given for staff in adult social care but not health and social care for children. This does give us a perception that our service isn't valued by the Scottish Government."

"Youth work and family support delivered at grassroots level makes an enormous contribution to health and wellbeing. It is preventative and reduces significant harm, yet it is under-valued, under-funded, misunderstood and under-supported."

Staff wellbeing

Throughout this headline report we have highlighted the impact of the pandemic on health and wellbeing. Staff are experiencing an impact on their own wellbeing. Delivering services has put people at risk of catching Covid-19, while staff working at home have also had less opportunity for support.

"Staff are struggling with their own wellbeing...Children in our care do not have to isolate meaning every child turns up regardless of how many staff can work. Do we lose families due to turning them away at the door, or do we run a service with unsafe ratios? We then balance quality care and education vs babysitting."

"We are concerned about wellbeing and vicarious trauma exposure due to increased isolation of staff witnessing events....and working at home without immediate access to support from colleagues."

"The impact on staff morale is being managed by good peer support."

Covid-related resource issues

It is also clear that guidance and regulations relating to the pandemic have also affected organisations, they have placed extra responsibilities onto staff and taken them away from their primary roles.

"Additional paperwork, taking employees away from their role with the children. Additional costs of staffing to meet the continued needs of guidance."

"Early year's staff have had so much piled on them. Extra cleaning, extra paperwork, the fear of Covid and bringing it home to our families. We've worked through the whole pandemic without a moan or groan and has no thanks for it."

Impact on partnership working

The pandemic has clearly had an effect on partnership working. In some cases, there is an increased sense of value of organisations roles. Some have also seen an increasing demand from schools to bring outside third sector support in.

"We sense an improved perception of our work and increased value from partners."

"Overall, we are managing to keep up our engagement and are actually working with more young people than before the pandemic due to increased demand for our services from local schools."

"The preventative role of youth work needs to be better understood by local decision makers...The lack of collaboration with statutory partners and poor communication is leading to disjointed delivery and a competitive landscape."

"Many of the schools we supported [before the pandemic] said that they would love to have our support just now, but the rules set by local authorities of 'no externals allowed' means that this support cannot take place."

However, respondents also highlighted that restrictions on outside organisations entering schools have limited opportunities for schools to engage with outside organisations despite an understanding of the value this will have for young people.

"Our organisation works in partnership with local schools on education, learning and health and wellbeing. Having restricted access to schools is having a negative impact on young people's health. Young people are anxious about transitioning to secondary school – they are afraid they will be on their own."

"Our services are seen as an add-on – not core."

"Our programme is volunteer driven...Unfortunately in some cases we are not able to have volunteers in schools and classrooms so young people are lacking these supportive relationships."

"Teachers are keen to return with pupils on [Outdoor Education] residentials but they are being prevented from taking this forward by some councils...the outdoors is the safest place for young people to be. We can and do provide residential experiences for some schools and young people. But we need to plan our way out of this....Stakeholders in outdoor education (schools, Education Scotland, councils, and the Third Sector)...need to collaborate to plan, adapt and move on. The aim should be to ensure that the residential experience is placed on a sustainable basis to be available for children and young people in the future."

3.2 Access to facilities

We also heard about organisations' access to facilities. Almost half told us that they still face challenges around accessing facilities. Of those who wanted access to Local Authority facilities, 43% said they have no access. 34% of organisations who want access to school facilities have no access. There are particularly significant barriers to access to leisure centres, faith-based facilities and also outdoor facilities. The most common reason for a lack of access was that buildings and facilities had not yet reopened due to the restrictions. This is affecting delivery of a range of services including youth work and mental health support.

The findings suggest organisations have found it easiest when they have access to their own facilities and that it has been particularly challenging for third sector organisations that don't have access to their own facilities. There also appears to be a lack of consistency across the country about when and where people can get access. Restrictions mean young people are missing out on valuable safe spaces.

Issues highlighted

- **Organisations have fared best when they have access to their own facilities**
- **Data shows that local authority run venues and schools are much more accessible to statutory services than to local third sector organisations**
- **Limited access to the 'safe spaces' that youth clubs/after school clubs offer**
- **Group numbers limited due to social distancing/limited access to venues**
- **Inconsistent practice around access to schools – in some local authority's youth workers have access, in others this is not yet permitted**
- **Access to community halls depends on attitudes of hall committees**

48% of organisations who participated in the survey said they were facing challenges around access to facilities, specifically:

Table D: Access to facilities

Facility type	Number of organisations in sample who want access to these facilities	Percentage of these organisations currently who have no access at all
Local authority-run premises	75	43%*
Schools	83	34%**
Leisure centres	55	51%
Faith-based centres	45	49%
Outdoor centres	47	47%
Other community centres	67	27%
Organisation's own	90	16%

*Significant difference between local authority run services where only 19% have no access and local third sector organisations where 65% have no access to local authority-run premises.

**Significant difference between local authority run services where only 17% have no access and local third sector organisations where 49% have no access to schools.

Reasons for lack of access to facilities

Table E: Where you don't have full access to the facilities you want to use, what reasons are you being given for this?

Reasons given when organisations don't have full access to facilities	% Organisations highlighting this reason
Building not open due to guidance/restrictions	39%
Local Authority not yet providing lets	21%
Building not open due to volunteer committee hesitancy about safety	11%
Building not open due to prohibitive cleaning/maintenance costs	11%

"Lack of access to venues means perinatal support is limited."

"Access to indoor meeting spaces is a significant barrier to providing services for young people and at the time of year when weather is an ongoing issue. Volunteers are tired and need support from Local Authorities to ensure facilities meet demand as there is a huge demand for our trusted programmes."

"The lack of pre-pandemic youth club facilities deprives young people from having invaluable space for themselves between home and school."

3.3 Impact of the emergence of Omicron Covid variant on services

We also asked people to consider the impact of the Omicron variant on their services. 92% respondents told us it was having 'some' or 'significant' impact on their services, with almost 30% saying the impact is significant:

- **27% say Omicron is significantly affecting services**
- **65% say they are seeing some impact on service due to Omicron**
- **8% say Omicron is not impacting on service**

Key issues:

- **Staff shortages due to sickness and self-isolation**
- **Young people away due to sickness and self-isolation**
- **Difficulties communicating with parents due to sickness and self-isolation**
- **Requirement to reduce group numbers**
- **Face-to-face support moving back online**
- **Access to schools more restricted as a result**
- **Heightened anxiety among parents and young people**
- **Drop in volunteer numbers**
- **Confusion with guidance**
- **Renewed restrictions in access to facilities indoors**

3.4 Experience of accessing short-term funding during the pandemic

A range of short-term funding opportunities have emerged during the pandemic for organisations to support their delivery. More than half the respondents had accessed this funding at some point during the pandemic. Respondents had accessed a wide range of these including the Furlough Scheme, Adapt and Thrive and the Connecting Scotland Digital Support Funds.

Funds accessed by respondents:

- **Furlough scheme**
- **Youth Arts Theatre Scotland Fund**
- **Wellbeing Fund**
- **Youth Arts Emergency Fund**
- **Adapt and Thrive**
- **Communities Recovery Fund**
- **Youth Work Education Recovery Fund**
- **Connecting Scotland - Digital support funds**
- **Summer of Play funding**
- **Outdoor Centres funding**
- **Youth Guarantee**
- **Social Isolation and Loneliness**
- **Cash for Kids**

Respondents highlighted a number of key uses for short-term funding that was available, including:

- **Staff posts through furlough scheme**
- **Emergency support for services that had to remain closed e.g. outdoor centres / theatre arts organisations**
- **New programmes to meet emerging need**
- **Digital access**
- **Practical emergency support: food, clothing etc.**

Perceptions of the funding landscape are mixed

More than half of the organisations who commented had accessed short-term funding, but a significant number hadn't accessed any funding.

Many organisations were positive about the funding that was made available, and said that it made a positive difference to their ability to keep their doors open, retain staff and offer much-needed support to children, young people and their families.

Support for digital access – both devices and internet – are regularly mentioned as a hugely important part of the practical support that was offered to young people to support health and wellbeing and access to learning.

A significant number of organisations also highlighted difficulties with the funding process, in particular:

- **The short-term nature of the funding impacts on the sustainability of support.**
- **It is difficult to recruit and train staff for short term contracts – net result was often strain on a core staff team that was already struggling to meet capacity.**
- **Short lead times to apply for funding meant that deadlines were missed / staff were under unreasonable pressure to turn proposals around.**

There is anxiety now about loss of short-term funding and lack of sustainable funding to meet ongoing need and retain skilled staff. There is also frustration about the focus on emergency/new programmes, and a perception that preference is given to these over investment in established approaches that are known to be effective.

"Funding was easily accessible and very much required."

"In some cases, the application and turn around periods for these funding opportunities are incredibly tight, which makes applying for them unrealistic – either as it would be impossible to put in a worthwhile application in time, or because it would not be possible to deliver what is expected in the short time available."

"All the water rushed to one end of the bath as most funders wanted to buy things or pay front line staff."

"Some funders suspended normal programmes, even those which funded the kind of stable relational work that young people needed more than ever, in order to create new programmes. Often these were rushed and poorly planned."

"We can't get funding to expand a small "pilot" service because it isn't "new."

"Between March 2020 and September 2021, 7 multi-year grants supporting youth work salaries, as is normal. We were only able to renew one, principally due to lack of availability, and less so, to oversubscribed programmes."

"Covid support during 2020 was excellent and really ensured we kept our doors open. This has pretty much disappeared overnight, yet we are not in a position to deliver our full services or able to generate our own income as we were prior to the pandemic."

"Short -term funding doesn't help the long-term issues."

"Community empowerment does not mean adding extra financial and time pressure on the Third Sector: we now have to apply for very competitive funding streams, take responsibility for buildings, deal with constant uncertainty and consistently have to justify our impact and value."

3.5 Additional support needed

Organisations were also asked about the additional support they needed from government and funders. The two key areas identified were further financial support and support for staff and volunteers. In addition a series of other suggestions were made, as summarised below:

Financial support

Respondents identified they need sustainable, longer-term funding to address the impact of the pandemic. This included a recognition of the need for core funding to be extended from 1 to 3 years. People highlighted that short-term funding causes pressure for staff and services and does not allow for meaningful and planned approaches to really resolve the issues.

Respondents also wanted more financial support to deal with practical challenges from the pandemic such as enhanced cleaning and provision of PPE.

We also heard how funding streams with short application times are problematic as staff are at capacity.

Key funding issues highlighted:

Longer-term funding to address impacts of the pandemic over time

- **Core funding extended from 1-3 years**
- **Medium to long-term commitment to supporting services to provide mental health and family support services**
- **A recognition that more long-term funding is required – short-term funding causes pressure for staff and service. Need time for meaningful and planned approaches to really resolve the issues**
- **The impacts of the pandemic will last longer than a year – funding should reflect this**

Longer lead times for funding applications

- **Funding with short application times is also problematic as staff are at capacity**

Monetary support to address practical challenges

- **Monetary support for the additional spending on cleaning and PPE**

Support for Staff and Volunteers

There was a desire for greater support for staff in relation to their own mental health and wellbeing, reflecting the negative impact the pandemic has had on many service providers. There was also inconsistencies highlighted in how wellbeing is supported across different local authorities.

In addition there was a desire for further engagement between national and local government and organisations working on the ground to develop a better understanding of the challenges they are facing and to provide more opportunities for engagement.

Key issues highlighted:

- **Somewhere to access information on making the process of becoming a volunteer easier to understand**
- **Mental health and wellbeing support and training for managers supported by Councils, Care Inspectorate, NHS and Scottish Government, recognising the impact of Covid-19**
- **Staff to be more carefully consulted by national and local government regarding the implementation of proposed policies**
- **More consistency in the way councils support their staff particularly in relation to wellbeing – some have this at the forefront, others do not take this into consideration at all**
- **A better understanding of the challenges faced by organisations. At the moment, some organisations express frustration at being required to conform to standards that are unattainable given staff capacity issues**

Other support required:

A series of other ideas were proposed by submissions.

- **Generally raising awareness of the importance and significance of our services**
- **It should be standard practice for education to work alongside our services**
- **Waiting lists for accessing essential services and urgent care need to be addressed**
- **The development of central, national resources providing guidance and support on insurance, safeguarding and risk assessments for organisations that would like to develop youth volunteering**

Changes to policy/guidance needed

Lastly we asked organisations about any changes to policy and guidance that they would like to see going forward to respond to the crisis. Organisations identified a range of changes they would like to see in relation to the development of policy practical Covid-19 guidance:

On policy

"Access to providing key support during school hours which means that teaching staff and pupils are benefiting from experienced Voluntary Organisations. We would happily work within a guidance document in agreement with schools/local authority which would allow staff access to deliver the programmes that are so vital to pupils at this time."

"Grant makers should come out and talk to front line workers, talk to local residents etc. If communities are to be listened to and their views taken into account in decision making processes, then this is the only way forward. If you work directly with the third sector then you will get a true picture of what is going on!"

"Policy to be informed by those who work in the field, on the floor."

"A new national youth work strategy which is ambitious and promoted heavily to government, formal education sector, health sector and businesses."

"Transparency on government spending."

"Under 5's review, as experience is affecting our employees."

"Increased financial support for families, especially those required to self-isolate."

"Those on lowest incomes should be given additional support with living costs."

"More support for organisations to plan for adapting services in a new delivery landscape. Developing relationships between youth work / CLD and formal education (voluntary sector as well as statutory sector youth work providers). Funding for core costs for voluntary sector organisations - enabling continued growth and development of area based prevention work. Radical change / accountability of education, community empowerment policy. Meaningfully engaging with community members and organisations."

"Equality between private and local authority wages in nursery settings."

"Generally raising the importance and significance of our services and embedding youth work into policy to support young people. It should be standard practice with education and formal settings to work alongside our services to better support young people."

On guidance

A number of organisations highlighted the need for more consistency in the rules from one local authority to another – current variation makes work more complex and costly.

"Consistency in rules about being able to offer support."

"More clarity about council buildings being open for essential family / children support."

"An easing of restrictions on families coming into settings."

"Reduction in paperwork for staff to allow them to focus on young people's wellbeing."

"Parents back in nursery in a planned way."

"An updating of guidance on Omicron symptoms."

"Better guidance on what a low risk / high risk contact is with children under 5 from whom staff cannot socially distance."

"A reduction in the period of self-isolation for unvaccinated / partially vaccinated staff who are contacts."

"Clearer guidance on isolation."

"Clearer guidance about access to outdoor facilities."