

Following the Prime Minister's announcement to the country on 23rd March stating that they must 'Stay at Home', Medway's charities and community groups were required to respond rapidly to help where needed.

Working together with statutory partners, many redirected their services to provide a wealth of local support – from food parcels and delivery, telephone befriending, welfare calls, financial guidance and helping the homeless.

To respond to the immediate crisis required great commitment, agility and effort from the sector; at the same time many organisations were dealing with a financial crisis (arising from loss of income generating opportunities running alongside substantial additional demand on services) and necessary operational changes for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries alike.

Medway Voluntary Action surveyed VCS organisations and groups who support some of the most vulnerable in Medway. The purpose of the survey was to give a 'voice' for the VCS, to raise 'real time' issues (which otherwise might have been lost in the 'noise' of the crisis) and to help find both immediate and post-crisis practical solutions for the VCS.

### Method Statement

*Over 1000 Medway VCS groups and organisations were contacted by email and phone in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.*

*129 organisations responded to survey questions (either over the phone or online), providing 'real time' data during the 6 week period 30<sup>th</sup> March – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020.*

*Responses were collected from a good and reflective range of size and type of organization, ranging from larger organisations with national umbrella support through to small, volunteer led groups. It included groups representing people of faith, mental health difficulties, lonely, isolated, end of life, carers, disabilities, health conditions, families, homeless, LGBTQ, sport, domestic violence, and more.*

*A number of organisations contacted were not available for comment. This could have been due to temporary closures in response to the Covid-19 crisis or due to immediate substantial impact resulting in these organisations closing shortly after its commencement.*

## **KEY FINDINGS FROM THE VCS SURVEY DATA**

### Financial Impact

The financial impact of Covid-19 on Medway's VCS has been significant and widespread. The four key factors contributing to this have been identified as:

- Loss of income generation opportunities (e.g. community fundraising events, loss of rental income and fee based services, trust funding restrictions)
- Unchanged fixed costs (e.g. rent)
- Unexpected additional costs associated with moving to remote working (e.g. IT platforms, laptops, mobile phones) and redirecting services (e.g. fuel costs for deliveries, PPE, new online resources)
- Additional demand on services

These four factors combined have led to a disrupted and 'at risk' VCS – the result of which will be closure and/or the loss or reduction of support to the most vulnerable in Medway.

*"We're currently only providing telephone support due to lockdown, but this will increase our phone costs."*

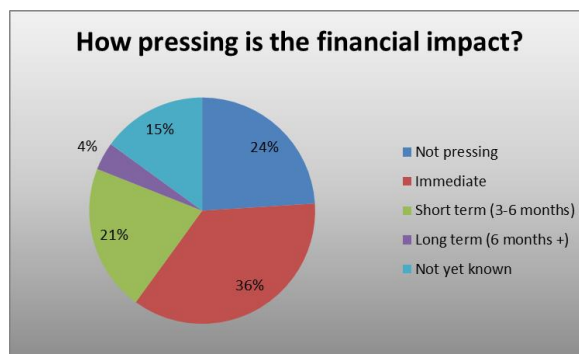
*"We received a grant for £1,000, however we are using it to pay for shopping for people that we hadn't budgeted for."*

*"A lot of our funding comes from the corporate and business sector and that funding will be significantly reduced as organisations try to re-coup their losses."*

*"We are incurring extra costs due to building new infrastructure for delivery."*

Key data derived from survey:

**Scale and Urgency** - 87% of the VCS have been impacted financially as a result of Covid-19, with 57% reporting that this is a significant financial impact for them. Of those reporting a financial impact arising from Covid-19, 57% considered the impact to be immediate or within 3-6 months.



*“We will be out of money in about 3 weeks for helping with shopping.”*

*“Unfortunately we are running out of supplies due to the current crisis and our collection points are now closed.”*

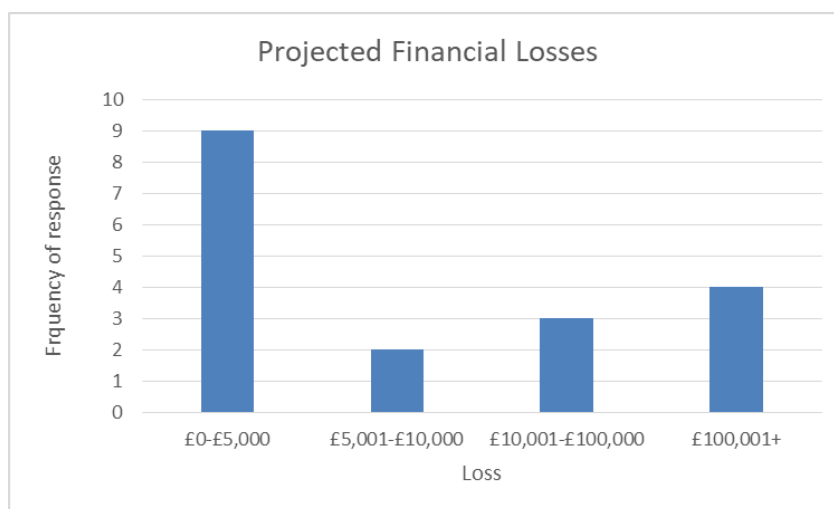
*“We will run out of money in 2 months time as we are not core funded and rely on grant funding and fundraising.”*

*“We will run out within months, we are not doing fund raising events, we will struggle by the end of this year.”*

*“Not very urgent for short term as we’ve just got a grant, but in the next few months we will need support.”*

**Estimated Value** - Some organisations were prepared or able to share with us an estimated value of the financial impact. The loss of income across the 18 organisations providing data totalled just under £1million (£903,150).

Equating to an average loss in income per charity of £50,175, the range of income loss varied across the organisations, illustrating that a reported ‘significant loss’ will have varying values depending on the ‘size and shape’ of an organisation.

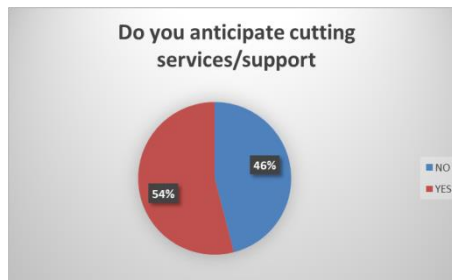
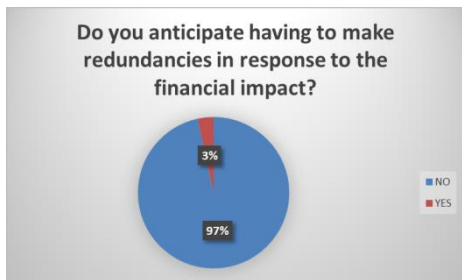


*“Unfortunately we are unable to fund-raise in our normal fashion so we are just dipping into our reserves which are not vast but we feel that we should be supporting the efforts of the many.”*

*“We are now spending funding meant for our rent.”*

*“Our community and individual fundraising has completely dried up - this is a significant impact.”*

**Impact of loss of income** – at the time of survey, responders gave their initial estimate of the impact; this included risk of redundancies and loss of services. Based on anecdotal evidence and feedback from MVA’s weekly VCS peer-support meetings, plans for dealing with the loss of income are evolving as organisations continue to assess the impact.



*“Three people are not being paid, and our long term is affected.”*

*“Not likely to run out of money this year but will impact on the services we will be able to provide in the future.”*

*“No fundraising, money is lost, we do have small grants, but they won’t last, we have had to furlough 5 people out of 8.”*

**A note on funding:** Extra resources have been made available by funders for the VCS (including £50k from Medway Council distributed via Kent Community Foundation).

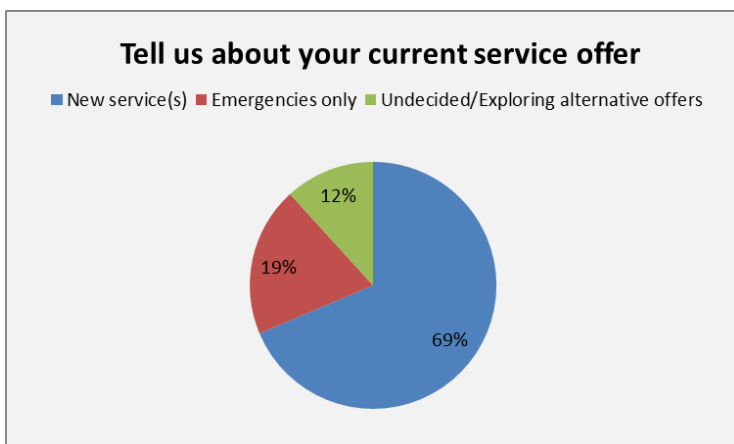
However, competition for funding is intense - and more so following the loss of alternative income generation sources as a result of Covid-19. Compounding this, larger funders (aiming to react urgently to the crisis) are tending to allocate additional funds to those already in receipt of their grants, and some organisations who had previously submitted applications for funding have been told funding programmes are now on hold.

Funding solutions are limited and unlikely to meet the scale of the financial need across Medway’s VCS. This is a national as well as local picture.

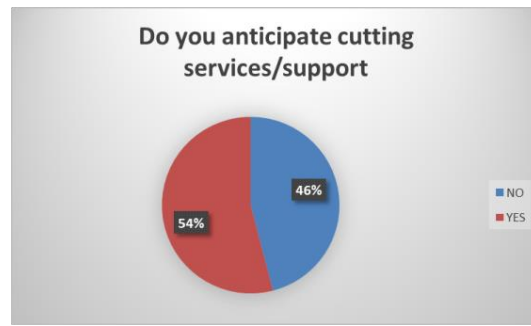
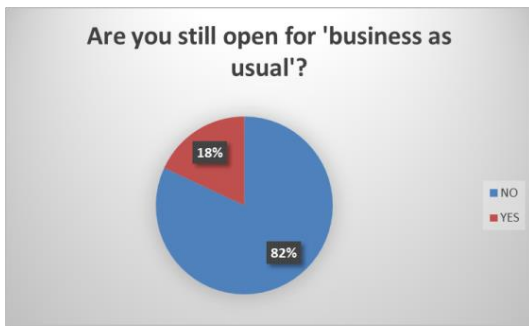
Medway Voluntary Action has been in touch with every group and organization that reported through our surveys that being financially impacted by Covid-19; everyone has been personally offered 121 support sessions, and access to funding sources, peer-support and training opportunities.

### VCS Support During the Covid-19 Crisis

69% of the VCS redirected their services away from their normal client support and delivery. This has resulted in vital support being delivered at the peak of the crisis, including:



- 20,000+ meals and food parcels delivered to the isolated & homeless
- 300+ collections of Prescriptions and Shopping
- Nearly 100 welfare checks were made with people experiencing mental health difficulties.
- 1,000+ weekly calls made on average to people experiencing loneliness or mental wellbeing difficulties.  
Over a 6 week period, this equates to volunteers chatting for over 120,000 minutes to help alleviate loneliness in Medway



Whilst the provision of this essential support has been of great value to Medway during the peak of the crisis; these redirected services may not form part of their mission and charitable objectives, and out of necessity the needs of existing service users have been compromised as a result of social distancing restrictions. Only 18% of the VCS felt they were able to deliver 'business as usual' and, largely due to loss of income, 54% anticipate they may need to cut existing services/support.

*"About 1/3 of our volunteers are delivering medicine, food and transport to vulnerable and high-risk groups of people."*

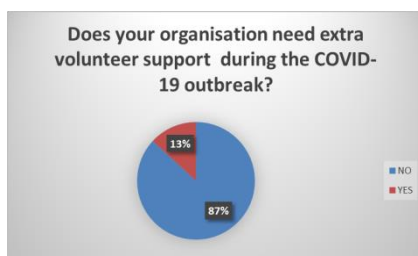
*"We are supporting vulnerable adults x 50 we still see them face to face with distance in between, we have made 100s of calls over the last several weeks, and we have been dropping off food 4/5 times a week."*

*"We are providing and developing online content and other solutions to help residents through this period."*

*"Day Centre is open to serve lunch (in takeaway containers) for consumption on or off the premises, supporting local hotels who have taken in rough sleepers as well as our regular guests who are vulnerably housed."*

*"We have volunteers that now provide cooked meals for the elderly and those that are bereaved."*

## Volunteering Support in Medway



Whilst only 18% of VCS required extra volunteers in the immediate wake of the crisis, those that did need extra support needed it quickly – and this support needed to be regulated in terms of safeguarding and duty of care considerations for clients and volunteers.

232 local residents volunteered through Medway Voluntary Action's Covid-19 Volunteer Register. We are still capturing data on volunteer placements arising from the Register, but we already know that a small percentage was successfully recruited to charities needing support. Additionally, all residents who signed up via the Volunteer Register received communications to thank them, provide updates on the Medway position and to offer them online training opportunities – and over 75% of people who signed up for the register also subscribed to the Medway Volunteer Network Bulletin (providing regular updates on local volunteering opportunities direct to their inbox).

*"MVA put us in touch with a local community group, and Ola has been collecting the food donation from us weekly."*

## Remote Working Capability

MVA have developed a 'Remote Working Evaluation Tool' for the VCS to help them to assess and explore solutions for ongoing and future service delivery.

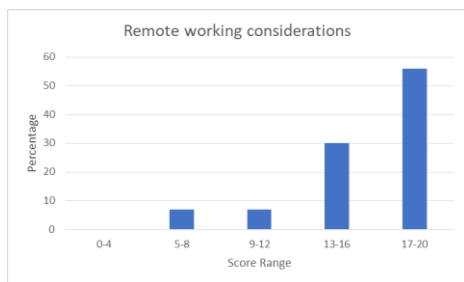
Take up of the online tool has been slow, and anecdotal evidence suggests this is because there is a wide spectrum of attitudes to remote working within the Medway VCS. This ranges from the view that 'business as usual' will resume in the near future, through to organisations proactively engaging in discussions and opportunities to 'transform' (e.g. participants in MVA's weekly online VCS peer-support sessions and the VCS Leaders Network Steering group).

*“Your Tool is not applicable to our group.... we hope it will not be too long before we are able to meet again.”*  
*“Our group will not be meeting until life is back to normal. We keep in contact with members via email and telephone.”*  
*“It is interesting to think about some of the issues raised by the tool.”*

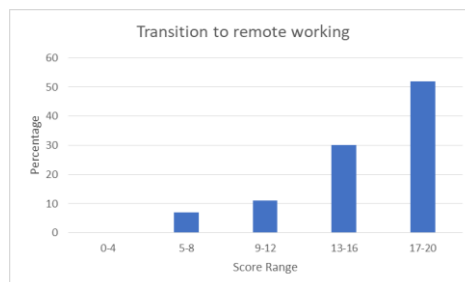
For those that have completed the online tool, many feel confident about moving to a more remote basis for operation support, but have less knowledge and understanding of how to deliver services and supporting service users remotely:

VCS Knowledge / Understanding Ratings based on Remote Working Evaluation Tool responses

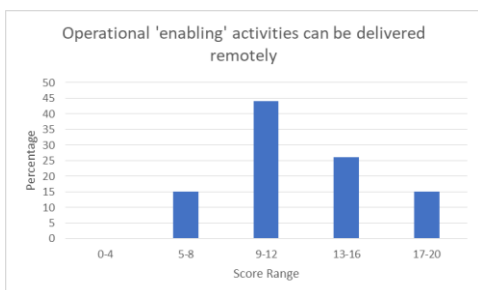
Remote working considerations for your back office functions (e.g. IT security, web platforms)



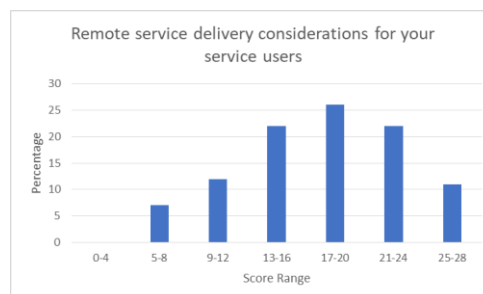
Issues related to making a transition to remote working (e.g. office space reduction, mental resilience)



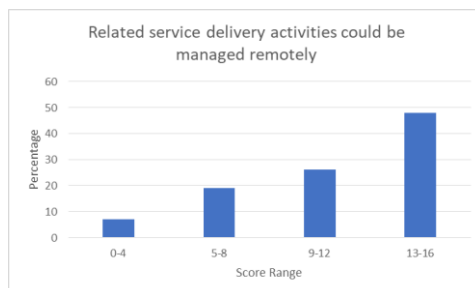
Operational 'enabling' activities (e.g. marketing, volunteer management)



Remote direct service delivery considerations (e.g. service user accessibility, training)



Service delivery related activities (e.g. monitoring, policies)



## Conclusion

The impact of Covid-19 on the VCS has been significant, both locally and nationally. It is widely predicted that over half of charities will not survive the economic impact of the virus, with one survey reporting 70% of charities have stated that they will go bust before the end of 2020\*. This will leave a massive vacuum of services that charities have provided flexibly, efficiently and at low cost.

However, the clients served by charities pre-Covid will still be there requiring support, and thousands of other individuals will join the queue due to the other impacts of Covid-19 whilst the crisis has been with us. This situation will be exacerbated over the subsequent recovery period which will inevitably involve the UK in one of the worst recessions we have ever experienced. It will be then that the VCS will be needed as never before, but it is highly unlikely that a response on even part of the scale required will be available. The impact on the public sector will therefore be equally as significant as demand outstrips statutory sector budgets.

The VCS are making their voice heard nationally to convey this message. In addition, it is widely accepted that the response to Covid-19 has been all the more effective due to the immediate, localised reaction from the sector and the assistance of hundreds of mutual aid groups that also emerged, many working under the guidance of their local CVS. Some local authorities reporting on lessons learned are saying that without this collaborative approach their Covid-19 response would have been far more problematic.

We are still unaware of whether there will be a second or even third wave of Covid-19. As this disaster caught us unaware and unprepared, both national and local strategies are now emerging to counter further 'disasters' with an immediate and more effective approach. With the projected significant demise of the VCS, these strategies are likely to fall at the first hurdle unless a major component within them identifies resource and implements measures to sustain and support the VCS - not just for the short term, but to help the sector respond to the lessons learned, become more resilient, and transform as a result.

## Acknowledgement

This report has been produced by Medway Voluntary Action.

MVA would like to thank Medway's Voluntary and Community Sector who gave their time to respond to our questions in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis when they were dealing with their own immediate priorities.

*Medway Voluntary Action*

*Registered Charity Number: 1042475*

*June 2020*

\* *Directory of Social Change Survey on the impact of Covid-19 on charities and those they serve – April 2020*