

Hardship Fund Covid -19

Scottish Government Funding Request

Introduction

The British Red Cross are currently delivering a range of targeted services to assist people in vulnerable positions facing destitution across Scotland, supported by grant funding from Scottish Government.

Targeted support is provided through the distribution of emergency cash, delivered in partnership with a broad range of statutory, non- statutory and third sector partners. In addition to this, the British Red Cross are actively developing a 'community of practice' of front-line organisations to ensure strong links are maintained between key agencies delivering support to those in vulnerable positions, including those with no recourse to public funds.

Through our work to date, we have developed referral partnerships with around 50 organisations, from both the third and public sector, which includes organisations working with asylum seekers, migrants, people who have experienced domestic violence, people who have experienced trafficking, and street work/homelessness organisations, among others. The community of practice will come from these organisations (and others if new needs emerge or particular expertise is required in a certain area. We will look to ensure the community of practice reflects referrals to the fund in terms of client groups, thematic areas, and geography.

We will design a Terms of Reference that offers a range of engagement opportunities, whilst creating space for more focused practice discussion recognising different time constraints and discussion requirements on particular needs. This would offer a blended approach to engagement within the 'community' of referral partners: there may be times when we engage with all referral partners – e.g. surveys/evaluation and information dissemination, times when we have more focused discussions amongst some agencies that benefit more from a more focused space, and times when a thematic learning opportunity has particular interest to referral partners. The community of practice aims to strengthen connections between agencies, explore and understand

- i) Why the needs exist
- ii) The options available to resolve these situations
- iii) And the voluntary/statutory sector offer to deliver meaningful and impactful support to those in that position.

However, this will require deeper insights around issues including access to emergency/short-term financial support and eligibility gaps. More information will be gathered from the current project - which is already providing valuable data on a national scale and increasing effective partnership development on the front line to people in vulnerable positions, such as those with no recourse to public funds.

We are therefore seeking support from Scottish Government to extend and expand on the current project model for a period of twelve months, with an agreed output to deliver

emergency financial support to those currently in crisis, and develop a clear project model to explore longer-term pathways out of destitution through an effective community of practice.

An initial one-year project would allow us to develop longer-term solutions to the issues of hardship and destitution that Covid-19 has highlighted and exacerbated. As these existed prior to Covid-19 and are likely to remain after the pandemic recovery, we also understand the impact of the forthcoming months when there are likely to be many changes as support provided during Covid-19 is withdrawn, as well as recognising other change implications such as Brexit. During this year, we would seek to develop a sustainable longer-term model in discussion with the Scottish Government.

Executive Summary

Through the facilitation of regular meetings and operational evidence, we will build an evidence-base of best practice casework services to understand the factors increasing the risk of destitution for people across Scotland. Our existing Hardship Fund partnerships highlight that people approaching the Fund have complex and varied needs, and there is significant learning from each partner around the most effective ways of working.

Building on the need for a practitioner-level space for discussion around these issues and the mapping of pathways that lead people into and out of destitution, we envisage a strong community of practice model that will encourage shared learning across Scotland.

The community of practice will be supported by the delivery of emergency cash grants, through a clear set of criteria, to ensure that people in a vulnerable position have access to funds to meet their basic needs, with a robust data and insight strategy to understand the reasons and issues affecting people.

Needs

Understanding the level of demand is one of the key objectives of this project proposal as British Red Cross, the Scottish Government, and our partners have all faced difficulty in estimating and defining the scale of destitution across identified risk factors, including those with NRPF, and the corresponding level of need in Scotland.

As recognised by the SG's Anti-Destitution Strategy, people face a range of risks and vulnerabilities, particularly during the current Covid-19 pandemic, that require additional support during the response. For example, our casework with individuals and families with NRPF have shown that those in this category have been far more likely to be negatively impacted by the restrictions and limitations brought on by an extended period of lockdown due to lack of access to cash support and advice services.

Increased risks of homelessness have been identified by partners, along with a higher incidence of food insecurity as well as increases in reports of domestic violence. Mental health issues have also been exacerbated during prolonged periods of isolation and higher risks of potential exploitation have been identified by agencies working in the fields of domestic violence and trafficking.

EU Nationals may face challenges in claiming benefits that they are entitled to receive due to difficulties evidencing residency criteria. Changes in legislation during the UK's exit from the EU will also inevitably lead to increased vulnerability for migrant workers across Scotland.

The combined impact of all these factors is the likely increase of extreme poverty, isolation and homelessness, exacerbated by the current need to additional challenges through things like self-isolation during the pandemic which will likely evolve and continue in some form over the coming twelve months. The British Red Cross believe that the delivery of emergency cash support and the sharing of practical support, resources, knowledge, advocacy through an effective community of practice represents a tangible and impactful response to these crisis needs.

Outputs

Distribution of emergency cash grants:

Distribution of an estimated 600 emergency cash grants to support people in vulnerable positions facing destitution, including those who have no recourse to, or face difficulties accessing, public funds.

Community of Practice:

Through the management of quarterly community of practice meetings that will support organisations to share expertise on key issues that impact people in vulnerable positions facing destitution.

Delivery of a quarterly community of practice where thematic discussion on areas such as legal advice, gender-based violence, trauma, or participatory routes to designing interventions based on experiences and the voices of clients can inform and support key partners to improve or enhance delivery of service.

Objectives

- To provide Scottish Government with the means to effectively support distribution of emergency cash grants to people in vulnerable positions facing destitution, who are not eligible to, or able to access, the Scottish Welfare Fund, utilising established cash delivery mechanisms and a network of trusted partners.
- To maintain and support a community of practice of trusted partners, established through funding provided by Scottish Government; to explore and better understand the underlying reasons for people finding themselves in destitution and the barriers they face to access emergency financial support; to explore the options for resolving their situation and to map operational responses across Scotland; and fully understand the impact that these interventions are having on Scottish Government's goal to address and resolve destitution across Scotland.
- To ensure a coordinated and connected response across all parts of Scotland through the dissemination of information and advice that will support a collective response that is high quality, person-centred, trauma-informed and strengths-based.

- To support a community of practice in creating a space to explore thematic reflections e.g. engaging specialist support around good casework practices, psychosocial practice and trauma informed design work to support people in crisis.
- To ensure partners are updated and share learning on the changing social security landscape in Scotland.
- To establish pathways out of destitution by supporting partners working with people in vulnerable positions and their families to plan a route out of destitution either directly or by onward referral.
- To ensure Red Cross and partner organisations effectively plan for transition periods including the withdrawal of support based around Covid-19.

Evaluation

Six-month mid-point review and twelve-month project evaluation to be undertaken to fully understand:

- What has been the impact of this Scottish Government funding on people in vulnerable positions facing destitution
- What statutory policy and practice issues exist and need to be addressed
- What training is required to enhance delivery of support from frontline staff and who can deliver that training
- What are the broader issues for accessing emergency financial support
- What interventions are meaningful to mitigating current barriers to support
- What should be the future operating structure after hardship funds delivered as part of the Covid-19 response

Methodology

To deliver an effective and impactful emergency cash-based response supported by a community of practice the British Red Cross would:

- Recruit operational staff required to build the infrastructure and operational partnerships to support delivery and ensure a high quality of distribution, data insight & problem solving
- Establish an operational lead as a point of contact for partners, building referrals through this partnership, to maintain and develop the existing partnerships model
- Management and delivery of emergency cash grants to ensure all partners have the means to deliver cash grants at scale; review of current dispersal system and identification of appropriate and most cost-efficient systems going forward beyond the Covid-19 response
- Ensure and develop the community of practice to support a participatory structure so that key agencies and individuals can be involved on thematic discussions, evidence-led reflective analysis and supportive learning and understanding of issues
- Clearly record and report the support that has been provided, decisions taken and baseline information recorded to address a lack of available monitoring data that is currently inhibiting a clear understanding of need across Scotland

Data collection

BRC conduct primary data collection utilising key indicators that will be used to assess the project's impact. This currently includes, but would not be limited to, key demographic data such as disaggregated age and gender, geographic location, migration status and current vulnerability.

Our work to date has benefited from the use of RedRose, a data management platform that integrates different data collection tools to manage demographic data related to those we are supporting with cash grants. The system also integrates with the payment mechanism used to distribute cash assistance. The platform provides robust monitoring and reporting capabilities so that data captured can then be transferred onto Tableau data visualisation software, allowing BRC to efficiently gather and analyse demographic data that can be shared with partners. For example, we are currently recording:

- The total number of people referred (plus dependents)
- The number of individual referrals
- The amount of funding being distributed
- The number of days between registration and the first distribution
- The percentage of single payments to multiple payments
- The local authority of people referred
- A breakdown of the reason(s) for the referral: NRPF, people facing homelessness or living in temporary accommodation, refugees and asylum seekers, people who have had disruptions or delays to welfare benefits or asylum support, people with a significant deterioration in mental health, people with a significant deterioration in physical health, survivors of GBV including domestic abuse, people who are shielding, etc.

This can be broken down by date to identify trends and developments.

Data collected is collated and analysed to provide BRC with a measure against identified project indicators which will then be used to monitor and evaluate the project's success, or where necessary, identify gaps or issues that exist. Data will also be analysed against key secondary data sources such as the BRC vulnerability index, to determine how well the targeting of the fund coincides with areas of greatest vulnerability.

In addition, BRC will use this information to analyse operational performance in terms of the speed beneficiaries receive funds following each referral. Case studies and regular dialogue with partners will then be used to provide qualitative data to gain a greater understanding of how grants are used, and if they are impactful in supporting vulnerable people out of crisis.

We recognise that an early step towards eradicating destitution in Scotland is to understand the scale, impact, and reasons for destitution along with the pathways to mitigate its impact. Through this 12-month period we will capture a significant body of evidence from a network of referral partners that will help to provide an insight into the conditions of destitution in Scotland and help inform the work of the Government's Anti-Destitution Strategy. This evidence will form a baseline of understanding on the scale of destitution in Scotland – and could continue to be updated over time on a regular operational basis.

Currently for our Hardship Fund, we are producing UK-wide update reports which can demonstrate the scale and geographic reach as well as the sorts of issues emerging. We are looking at translating this format into a Scottish data set format, expanding on the reasons for destitution and looking at issues around food insecurity. We will be working with BRC's Innovation & Insight team to collaborate on further research, and would be keen to link with Scottish Government analysts to identify specific additional questions and develop a workable approach.

This could also assist, for example, in leading conversations at the community of practice. The community of practice will also create the environment, in which as well as evidencing destitution, more preventative practice and future solutions can be discussed to help identify policy and practice solutions to prevent destitution from occurring.

Exploring pathways out of destitution

From our own casework experience, we feel that the following approaches are integral to effective pathways out of destitution:

- Working closely with the client in a trauma-informed way to fully understand their circumstances and what their rights, entitlements and immediate needs are
- Establish referral pathways and support mechanisms for clients so they can access these, while providing advocacy support if barriers in place
- Communicate regularly with other support organisations within the sector to identify trends within these barriers and work collaboratively to break them down
- Continue to refer to and link with statutory services where a need has been established, and continue to support clients to advocate for themselves around this to ensure pathways out of destitution and current situations are as effective and sustainable as possible

We do not see standard approaches to casework being developed as each partner will have their own ways of working, related to their specialisation and place within the third sector. We do however see a **promotion of best practice** and **development of minimum standards** around doing trauma-informed casework with a client in establishing their rights and entitlements, and **collective advocacy** around ensuring access to statutory services and specialist support is realised.

Client experiences within the immigration system (that arguably leads to destitution) are long and arduous. They can often represent a rollercoaster of interviews, claims and appeals. There is no overnight fix, but there is support to help people understand the system they are journeying through, and what pathways out of destitution are available to them.

Budget

During the proposed twelve months of funding, the British Red Cross will support distribution of £200,000 in emergency cash grants to support an estimated 600 grants to people in vulnerable positions (plus dependents) facing destitution.

This figure is based on an evaluation of the delivery of the Hardship Fund in Scotland between May 2020 and February 2021, during which time the British Red Cross supported over 400 people

with cash grants, totalling over £150,000. Based on analysis of the project, supported by the Scottish Government - which has also included the development of a community of practice - we are forecasting an overall increase in the number of people who can be supported by the project under the proposed timescale.

In line with the previous Scottish Government funding, there will be operating costs associated with the dispersal of grants, developing the community of practice and the other objectives outlined in this proposal. This will be capped at 25% of the total distributed, and will cover:

- the costs of operating the dispersal system
- staff and management time to enhance the community of practice,
- staff and management time to maintain, support and develop the referral network, data analysis, insight and evaluation.

Total of grants to be dispersed over the financial year: £200,000

Development & Operating costs (at 25%) of above: £50,000

Summary

Partnership development, casework and cash distribution, supported by funding from Scottish Government, has shown that effective collaboration and focussed interventions can significantly enhance the support given to people in crisis.

Strategic collaboration on destitution is clearly still needed to support local resilience partnerships and ensure all resources are maximised effectively, so that support can be coordinated across the statutory and third sectors, particularly during the forthcoming months when there are likely to be many changes as support provided during Covid-19 is withdrawn. The national reach of the British Red Cross and the identification of non-statutory partners across Scotland therefore remain essential to ensure access to support is available to those most in need during this transition.

We are therefore seeking support from Scottish Government in the form of £250,000 over a period of twelve months, to allow the British Red Cross to deliver financial assistance to those currently in crisis, and ensure long-term sustainable casework is adequately delivered through the dissemination of information, accurate mapping of resources and active collaboration across all sectors. This will be underpinned by the delivery of a meaningful and impactful community of practice.

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