

Written Evidence submitted by Good Things Foundation

About Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation is the UK's leading digital and social inclusion charity. We bring together a network of thousands of hyperlocal community partners across the country (the Online Centres Network), working together to reach those who need support. Through our online learning platform, Learn My Way, we've supported more than three million people to gain digital skills since 2010.

Our network partners are all independent of Good Things Foundation - they are small community centres, local charities supporting people with disabilities or unemployment, homeless shelters, job clubs, libraries, Age UK centres, et al. We call it a 'big club with a shared vision' - a vision of a world where everyone can benefit from digital.

Good Things Foundation works alongside funding partners including Accenture, Mastercard, BT, Google.org, and Lloyds Banking Group. Our projects have been supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, Children In Need, the NHS and several Government departments.

Overview

Good Things Foundation supports a UK-wide network of hyperlocal community partners, many of whom are independent charities. Some charities within our network have managed to adapt to Covid and deliver their digital skills support remotely, and support and funding from Good Things Foundation and our partners has helped in this regard.

However, according to our surveys, over a fifth of our community partners have had to close their doors – in some cases permanently. It has been difficult to maintain the same level of contact and support that in-person training provides. Many of our partners are also community interest companies (CICs) or social enterprises. In discussing government support for charities, we must also explore the knock-on effects for these groups.

This short response focuses on our conversations and data collection from network partners; the impact of furlough; and some of the gaps in support with regards to CICs.

Our response

- We awarded £375,000 from a [Response and Resilience Fund](#) to 125 of our network community partners, helping them continue to support local people to engage with digital. The unrestricted grant funding, sourced from an initial £375,000 contribution

from Good Things Foundation's own reserves, provided a significant cash injection to the community partners who needed it to help them survive.

- Our '[Covid response report](#),' published in July 2020, assessed how we and our network of community partners responded to the period between March and June 2020 (coinciding with the first lockdown).
- By the end of March 2020, 21% of network partners who responded to our survey had closed entirely, whilst 71% were continuing to support their community remotely.¹ A limited number kept their spaces open but limited access to comply with social distancing measures. Whilst 61% of partners saw a decline in demand, 23.2% noted increased demand, especially from more vulnerable people. The decline in demand was likely caused by the reduction in physical services, with many of our partners providing services beyond digital skills support (such as libraries).
- Of the community partners who remained open, they faced the question of how to evolve their face-to-face support to a remote delivery model, while struggling to keep their own organisations afloat.
- Prior to lockdown, community partners' funding was linked to delivery and performance. Several partners reported that these performance requirements would have posed major cash flow issues. With full support from our funding partners, we lifted these performance requirements for an initial 12 week period, meaning that some of their funding could be secured, but this was only a partial solution.
- We recently conducted interviews with a number of centres in our network who receive funding from Good Things Foundation. Furlough proved to be a difficult choice for many of our community partners and it was not a simple solution to the cashflow issues that many faced. The policy proved useful for reducing staffing costs, but at the same time reduced the ability of partners to help those in need.
 - At a time when so many were struggling to learn how to get online to order food, book GP appointments, shield effectively, work from home, and avoid social isolation, this could seem like an impossible choice – pushing those in need away for the sake of charity survival.
 - Some centres attempted to offset the reduction in staff capacity by bringing in volunteers, but those that did highlighted the unsustainability of this situation. It was more common, therefore, for non-furloughed staff to keep working longer, unpaid hours to make up for the lost capacity.
 - Therefore, whilst the furlough scheme has almost certainly saved hundreds of thousands of jobs, it could have been tailored to support charities better – for example, by allowing 'flexible' or part-time furlough from an earlier date.
- Some of our partners slipped through the cracks of support. For example, one partner in Glasgow said that they received no support from the Government due to their status as a CIC. They said that “being a CIC was a stumbling block. Grantors seemed to think that we could get funding elsewhere, and that charities were in greatest need for funding. As a result, we were overlooked. As a CIC we also supported other charities during the pandemic as we knew how to reach our target demographics, whereas some charities were unable to do this.”
- As support for charities was reduced, this pushed further pressure on some of our non-charity community partners, particularly CICs. Our partner in Glasgow said: “As

¹ Good Things Foundation, Network Coronavirus Response Survey, responses after lockdown announcement on 23rd March 2020 (n=173)

funding dried up after the first lockdown, the charities we were working with felt much less supported, almost forgotten about. Funders were saying that people were out and about so there was less need to provide funding. The work that charities were doing was pushed onto the third sector, yet we also had funding constraints.” Greater signposting for support was also identified as a need, with our partner suggesting that a single online platform for the third sector would have alleviated some concerns.

Recommendations

The Government should:

- Improve the signposting of support for charities and other third sector organisations
- Introduce greater financial support for community interest companies and social enterprises, who often had to pick up the work that charities were no longer able to do
- Tailor the furlough scheme to better support third sector organisations’ needs
- Adopt a joined-up approach with devolved governments to ensure that all third sector organisations receive the support that they need to recover from Covid

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