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Evaluation of the Special Funds for the Sexual Violence Voluntary and Community Sector

Summary report

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This is a report of the results of independent research commissioned by the Government Equalities Office and conducted by Shared Intelligence with Jane Ellis Consulting. Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Government Equalities Office or any other Government Department.

Summary report

Evaluating the Special Funds

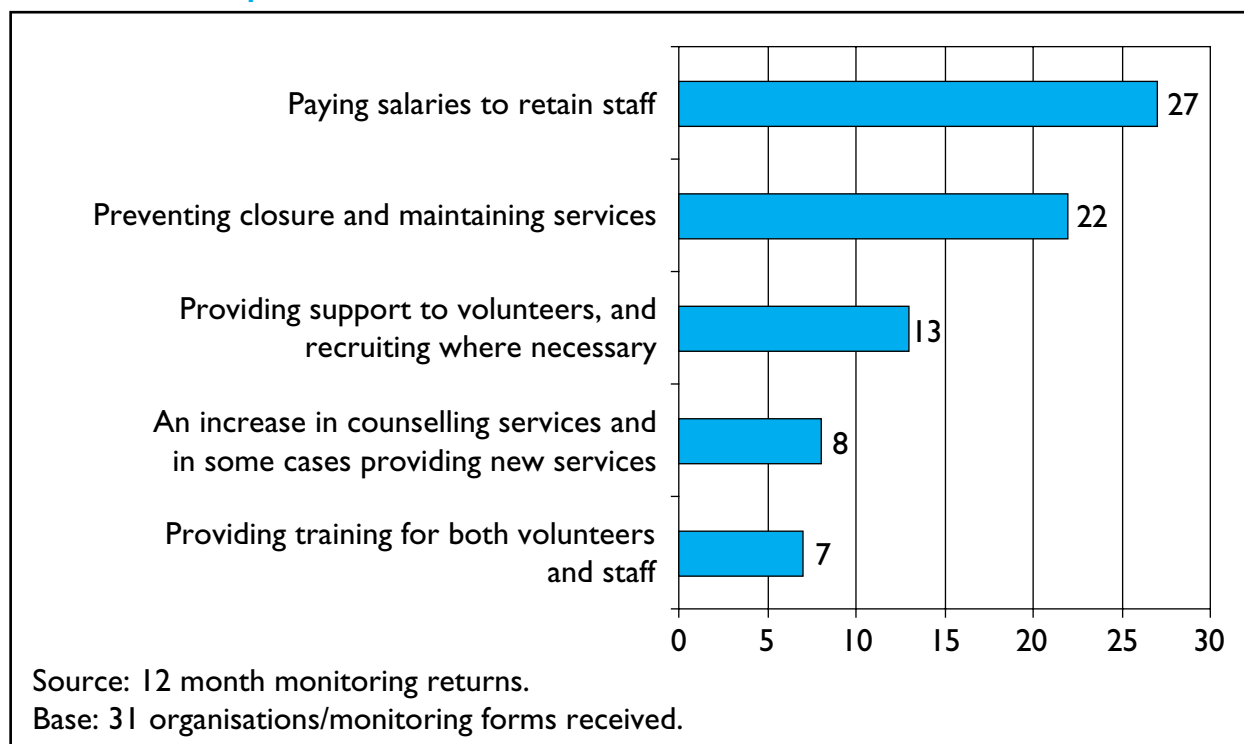
1. Shared Intelligence, in partnership with Jane Ellis Consulting, was commissioned in February 2010 by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) to undertake the evaluation of the Special Fund (and the Emergency Fund retrospectively). The focus of the evaluation has been to measure the impact of the Funds on voluntary and community (VCS) funded organisations, their users, and the wider sexual violence VCS.
2. In response to research that identified instability within the sexual violence VCS, the Emergency Fund (in 2008/9), followed by the Special Fund (2009/10) were created. Specifically, the **objectives for the Funds** were:
 - to alleviate short-term financial and fundraising difficulties in the sexual violence sector;
 - to facilitate capacity building; and
 - to provide continuity of services to victims.
3. The Emergency Fund was open to members of Rape Crisis England and Wales, and a total of 22 organisations were given grants to the total sum of £1.1 million. The subsequent Special Fund was initially awarded to a total of 40 organisations who received grants to the sum of £1.6 million.
4. The evaluation has focused on identifying the main **outcomes** from the activities delivered through the two Funds and assessing the contribution the Funds have made to any changes observed.
5. We have also looked at **learning** from the process by which the Special Funds been implemented including exploring ‘what works for which types of organisations in what circumstances’ and the extent to which the funding has delivered value for money? In our conclusions we have used these findings to ask ‘What transferable lessons have been learned?’ and ‘what are the implications for the future?’

- The **methodology** included: an analysis of monitoring data from both Funds; interviews with national partners and the 39 organisations who received the Special Fund; a learning workshop for funded organisations and in depth case study research with eight organisations, including interviews with staff, users and local partners.

How have the Funds been used?

- Monitoring data from the organisations in receipt of the Emergency and Special Funds shows that both Funds were used primarily to cover core costs such as salaries, rent and office overheads, volunteer training and expenses.
- In turn this has meant that access to existing services have been enhanced through more skilled staff, better trained volunteers, longer opening hours and targeted outreach work.

Use of the Special Fund




9. Most commonly, these uses of the Funds provided **continuity of services for users and prevented closure of the funded organisations**. More indirect uses of the Special Funds for organisations included releasing staff time to participate in partnership working, increasing the profile of organisations and the services they provide, and improving the ability to seek more sustainable funding.

What difference have the Funds made?

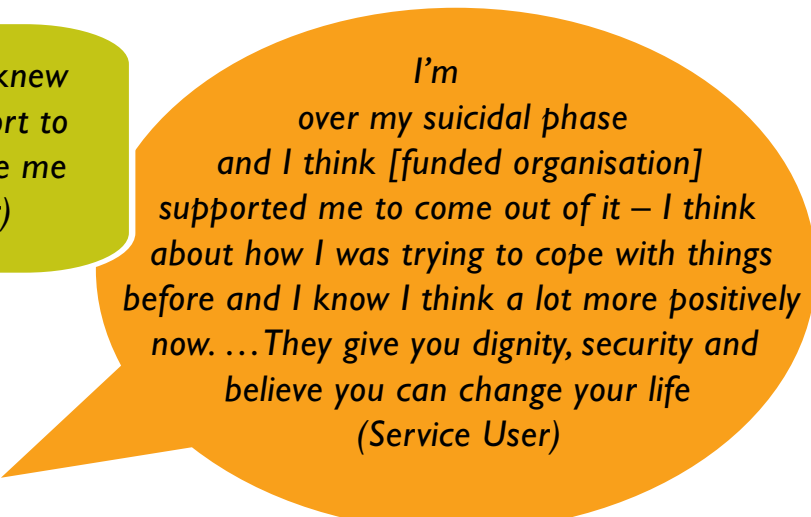
10. For **service users**, the main benefit of the two Funds has been to ensure to continuation of services. Users describe vividly the profound and positive impact that using VCS sexual violence services have had on their mental and physical health, and their emotional well-being.
11. They also point to the reasons the services have had this impact – because of the professionalism of the specialist counsellors, the accessible and safe environments, and the user focus through flexible approaches and timescales.

...it was scary at first [talking about abuse], but it helped me a lot. Because at first when I came here I didn't know whether I'd be able to speak about it, it took me a little while...it was new to me you know because they [the words] had been stuck in there for so long. But it helped me to feel better, and I've done quite a lot of work over the four years. (Service User)

...before I came out [talked about abuse] I suffered from depression and I was on medication and I'm no longer needing to take medication... that's a massive change. So I feel much better, I can cope with stress much better. I'm more productive at work (Service User)



I have started my life again, I knew I could but I needed the support to know it was worth it. They gave me that support. (Service User)



I'm over my suicidal phase and I think [funded organisation] supported me to come out of it – I think about how I was trying to cope with things before and I know I think a lot more positively now. ... They give you dignity, security and believe you can change your life (Service User)

12. Most users we spoke to had used other more generic, statutory services previously and favourably compared the VCS services with these because it is a free, high quality specialist service.
13. For **VCS organisations**, receiving the Funds has allowed continuity of services and short term stability. This has enabled them to maintain the quality of their specialist services through increasing staff and volunteer resources.

“In all honesty, [the Special Fund]...it’s probably the only thing that has kept us open...in terms of running the centre or service. It enables us to continue all the amazing activities that take place...the counselling, the helpline, the befriending. So it enabled us to stay open in order to provide those activities to the people that need them.”

(Funded organisation)

14. In this way the Funds have been used commonly for core costs, which has also enhanced service delivery and operational processes. For example, staff have been freed up to concentrate on discrete areas of work through the separation of functions; processes such as administration and management have been professionalised; organisations have increased their capacity to work more closely with local partners, increasing their local profile and referrals, and seeing more clients as a result.

“This funding has also meant that we could develop strategic partnerships with the local authorities and local voluntary sector and develop an active outreach service, reaching out to young people and sex workers in particular.”

(Funded organisation)

15. The increased profile and contact with partners, and the credibility that government funding gives, has helped organisations widen their access to funding and lever in additional income. However, this has not yet brought long term stability to any funded organisation and all organisations were acutely aware of the impact that financial cuts being introduced by the coalition government would have on the budgets of the statutory and charitable bodies that currently provide their funding.
16. For the wider sector the two recent Funds have increased capacity and profile of the sector overall through preventing individual organisations closing, enabling essential services to continue and increasing usage. They have also encouraged more networking and sharing of good practice between funded organisations.
17. However, this has not necessarily led to a more coherent and sustainable sector. The changes in eligibility criteria of the two recent Funds, and the current Combined Fund, appear to have had a divisive effect within the VCS, both between gender-specific and mixed gender services, and between specialist sexual violence organisations and more generic organisations providing some sexual violence services.

Learning for sustainability

18. The Special Funds were designed to alleviate short term funding crises in the sexual violence VCS by building organisational capacity and providing continuity of services for users. The Funds have met these objectives, but there are questions about the sustainability of the sector if it relies on short term funding to lurch from crisis to crisis.
19. Organisations valued the Special Funds as core funding in that it could be used to support the organisational capacity to provide a range of services. Unlike a lot of other funding, particularly from local authorities and PCTs that commission rather than grant aid VCS organisations, it was not tied to specific projects or service outcomes.
20. Not only is this sort of core funding more flexible, it can also provide the capacity and leverage for other, long term funding. Several organisations stressed how the Special Funds were helpful in securing other funding from local statutory organisations and charities. This shows how **central government funding can encourage and lever in local funding**.
21. In turn, this suggests a distinctive role for central government funding of covering core costs to ensure there is a consistent infrastructure of VCS sexual violence services across the country, providing continuity of free (or donation only), accessible and high quality services for users.
22. This would ensure equality of access to services and avoid a 'postcode lottery' from different local policies and priorities. Organisations could then negotiate local funding and in-kind support with local statutory agencies and charities to fund specific services that reflect local priorities, circumstances and user needs.

23. For this role to be effective in *sustaining* VCS sexual violence services, any **government funding needs to be longer term** than for a year. Although the Special Funds have shown the potential of government funding, it will only result in leveraging additional long term funding if it is secure enough for organisations to be seen as stable and credible enough to be commissioned to provide services to vulnerable people.
24. In terms of **value for money**, there is a clear **business case for long term investment in a sustainable sector infrastructure** to:
- enable a distinctive service that cannot be provided by more generic organisations;
 - encourage volunteering which both reduces the costs of the services in comparison with statutory services and puts the idea of the 'Big Society' into practice;
 - lever in long term funding from local statutory organisations and charities, through grant aid and commissioning;
 - reduce costs to the 'public purse' in relation to poor health, welfare benefits, housing benefits etc. through an effective approach which results in positive user outcomes.



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