



## Moving from crisis to recovery - case study

This case study may be of interest to any third sector organisation who is having to adapt and learn as they go in uncertain times.

In 2020 and 2021 Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) supported sixteen projects affected by the COVID-19 crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the crisis. The aim of this support was to strengthen their response and their recovery, by improving what they do or guiding future plans and strategies. This work was supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

**First Step Development** helps people affected by addiction to recover and reach their potential through new wider social connections, opportunities to learn and to become more active in their communities.

During the crisis they diversified activities. They set up from scratch a food storage and delivery service for people across Falkirk and West Lothian. They supported families affected by domestic violence.

They experienced an increase in the number of volunteers and volunteer hours contributed. They also made new connections and partnerships, helping to establish the West Lothian Food Network.

Maria, First Step Development Manager, tells us more.

## Why did we get involved in this peer learning programme?

We wanted the opportunity to reflect on our own experiences of the past year and with support maximise the learning and evaluation of our experiences.

We wanted to answer these questions:

- What difference did the food supplies/baby supplies provision make to families affected by domestic abuse.
- Is this a new client group we should support? Is there a gap here/what are the needs?
- How can we maintain the brilliant momentum achieved by our volunteers as they responded to the new urgent needs brought on by Covid-19



# What are we learning about our work through this crisis?

## 1) We are creative, flexible and adaptable

We have used learning throughout the crisis to plan what next. Our approach has been similar to action research. Trying to reflect all the way along and listen to different voices all the way along has helped us learn about “what works”.



For example, we looked at our usual **level of engagement** for food parcels and found many participants weren't attending the community larder to collect food parcels. We asked some people why and **they told us** while they were happy to have parcels delivered to their home (during lockdown) they did not want to be seen collecting food parcels. This led to us rebranding the community larder to the community “eco hub”.



The pandemic really made us appreciate our people as our most important assets and we were able through very clear and regular communication to become even better internally connected and to really “work as one”.



When needed, bike mechanics were delivering food parcels and food and parcel volunteers were taking bikes to key workers or giving them to people that were struggling and wanted them for work or health.

## 2) We met a need for a new client group

We started delivering essential items to families affected by domestic violence as it seemed there were no organisations meeting this need. This idea came from our weekly meetings. During Covid-19 we started to review and discuss across our teams on a weekly basis how we were meeting the new needs and what other opportunities were emerging. These discussions formed the foundation of our responses.



**Feedback** from families showed us how valuable this work was.



We also carried out a **survey** with referral agencies and asked them about existing services in this area to find out how we could work together. It is essential to make time to reflect regularly and ensure that as many diverse voices are heard and contribute to decision making.

## 3) The pandemic has been a catalyst for volunteers to develop new skills

While we had many people offer their support, we decided early on to offer volunteering roles primarily to our participants (people affected by addiction).



We have noticed volunteers thriving during this time. We have **seen** them develop a sense of ownership and build new skills. Some volunteers are now preparing to apply for employment as a result. The crisis and process releases a new form of volunteer capital that we now need to maintain.

## How is this helpful to our organisation?

### Service planning:

We have already used our learning to develop new services. We found a new partner to work with in Falkirk to continue supporting women experiencing domestic violence. The ESS programme has helped me engage with our team. It's so important for us to step back and reflect strategically and how we are spending our time. We've been much more effective and had control over things. This has helped us re-focus. Without this support it would have taken us much longer to get there.

### Community engagement:

We have been using the learning to help keep us on track over the past few months. We have also used learning to consult and develop a new Community Eco-Hub in Bridgend.

### Using learning to put in another application to the Lottery:

We are currently preparing to apply for further funding from the Lottery, where we have used this learning and evidence.

## Our tips for other organisations

- Try and **reflect as soon as possible** because the things are changing very quickly and it's really helpful to reflect while things are still clear in everyone's minds.
- It is important to **step back**/reflect so that you have a chance to think critically and make better decisions. It's hard to make time to step back when you just want to help clients but stepping back DOES help client if you end up reflecting and delivering a better service.
- Also look at what you would **do differently** if you could go back in time. There is a lot of learning from that process too.
- Make time to **listen** to other organisations' experiences. I felt reassured during the pandemic by talking to other organisations and feeling like "We were all in it together". There was a collective rolling up of sleeves to do what was needed and orgs stepped back to let others better placed get on with helping.

### Contact details

If you would like ESS's support please contact us at [info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk).

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