

**Mental
Health**

Sustainability
Programme

Mental Health Sustainability Programme

Final Evaluation Report

March 2023



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Definitions and Abbreviations

The Association	The Association of Mental Health Providers
MHSP	Mental Health Sustainability Programme
Private Sector Partners	Private sector companies involved in delivering support to the Mental Health Sustainability Programme
Providers	Mental health organisations from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector delivering mental health and wellbeing care and support services
VCSE Sector	Voluntary, community and social enterprise sector
City Mental Health Alliance	A not-for-profit membership organisation for private sector, creating mentally healthy workplaces
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
Minoritised community	Groups of individuals belonging to communities that have been racialised such as Black, Asian, and other minority groups.

Introduction

Charity Fundraising Ltd was commissioned by the Association for Mental Health Providers (the Association) to evaluate the impact of the Mental Health Sustainability Programme (MHSP).

The Association is the leading representative body for voluntary and community sector mental health provider organisations in England and Wales. Operating as a registered charity, The Association represents a membership of small, medium and large providers – from locally focused to regional and national organisations with the purpose of providing a professional platform on which the vital work of all members can be seen and heard.

Members provide direct mental health services covering the full range of provision from crisis care, liaison and diversion services, substance misuse services, complex needs, to advice and counselling to people with lived experience. Specialisms amongst members include targeting minoritised communities, mental health, children and young people’s mental health, housing and homelessness, employment support, IAPT and secure pathways – taking a whole-life and whole-person approach.

The MHSP was funded through a significant investment from Goldman Sachs and partners including private donors and others. It aims to enhance the way that the VCSE sector works in partnership with the private sector to improve people’s mental health and wellbeing with private sector companies being invited to donate skills, resources and funding to VCSE mental health service providers; thus, enabling them to sustain services during and after the pandemic.



MHSP development since the interim report

The main focus over the last year has been on providing grants through the Mental Health Sustainability Fund and supporting VCSE organisations through the new offer of Sustainability Toolkit sessions, as well as a Sounding Board, ad-hoc Webinars and Peer to Peer Virtual Support Forums.

The learning from the Mental Health Sustainability Programme has now been embedded in the Association's core delivery programmes. This will enable the Association will continue to ensure that efforts to support smaller providers of their membership are sustained and central to their wider work and projects.

Outcomes Framework and Evaluation

Methodology

The overarching goal of the MHSP was to support provider organisations to be more sustainable. In order to measure the achievement of this goal, the evaluation has focused on measuring the following intermediate outcomes:

- Provider Organisations have had better access to support to improve knowledge, systems and processes;
- Provider Organisations have been more able to achieve impact;
- Provider Organisations have been more able to continue delivering services, grow, and sustain themselves;

The methodology employed to evaluate the MHSP included:

- Interviews with MHSP staff;
- Interviews with Staff and Volunteers in Provider Organisations;
- Interviews with Private Sector Partners;
- Round table discussion at a Governing Body Meeting;
- Review of data provided by grant funding recipients;

Activities – Year Two

Mental Health Sustainability Fund

In the second-round of the Mental Health Sustainability Fund, 29 grants were awarded to a range of organisations across England with incomes between £14,000 and

£250,000, all of whom supported people with mental health needs, with 28% supporting organisations led by or supporting minoritized communities.

29 organisations received a share of approximately £82,031

Year 2 Grant Recipients	
Anorexia and Bulimia Care	Autism Family Support Oxfordshire
Baby Umbrella	BLAM UK
Chrysalis Care New Generation	Creativity Works
Free Your Instinct	Happy Times Activities
HOPE – South Yorkshire Fire, Road and Water-related Trauma Support for Families	Make a Difference Tavistock
Mindful Peak Performance CIC	Music24
Oxfordshire Chinese Community and Advice Centre	Oxygen
Pregnancy Crisis Care (Plymouth and SE Cornwall)	Relate Chesterfield and North Derbyshire
Reverse the Trend Foundation	Somewhere House Somerset
South Asian Health Forum	Space to Breathe CIC
Step Out Mentoring (The Wells Trust)	Support ME Maternal Project
Tandem	The Brave Project CIC
The Craig Tyler Trust	The Flowhesion Foundation
The Sporting Memories Foundation	Winchester Youth Counselling
You Raise Me Up	

Helpline Fund

Following a generous donation of £50,000 from BUPA in November 2021, the MHSP launched the Helplines Fund. The Helplines Fund enabled organisations to develop their capacity to meet significant increases in demand for their services during the pandemic. By way of illustration, some organisations had experienced increases of 140%, 240% and 313% in calls to their helplines and assistance was clearly required to keep the desired levels of helpline service and delivery sustainable. Overall, 12 organisations were awarded grants of up to £5,000 each.

Helplines Fund – Grant Recipients	
Mustaqbill (Future) Foundation (operating the Find-A-Friend service)	Reach Out for Mental Health
PANDAS Foundation	Youthline Ltd
Mthwakazi Queens	Anne Robson Trust
Muslim Youth Helpline	Karen
Chester Sexual Abuse Support Service	Rahab Project
London Nightline	Moodswings

The grants awarded were used by the twelve organisations to maintain and develop a wide variety of helpline-related services, including:

- Multi-lingual translation of websites;
- Volunteer and staff training
- External supervision costs;
- Costs towards anti-racism work and diverse recruitment practices;
- SEO, marketing and social media promotional work.

Sustainability Toolkit

The Sustainability Toolkit was developed during early 2022, with delivery commencing in March 2022. The aim of the sessions was to provide organisations with a range of resources and learning opportunities in organisational development, finance, legal, HR, wellbeing and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) practice.

18 people provided information about their needs before they participated in the sessions which gives some insight into their motivations for accessing this part of the MHSP:

- Identifying strengths and gaps in their organisation
- Keeping up to date on third sector legal requirements
- Refreshing their legal policy, procedures and templates
- Building on their current knowledge
- Helping them create better formats/templates for management accounts
- Exploring how to improve self- and organisational management
- Increasing knowledge on how to ensure wellbeing/sufficient self-care for the team
- Developing skills to enhance business plans and strategy development
- Bettering their understanding of approaching a long-term strategy and SMART objectives
- Evaluating organisational strengths and how to build on them and grow the organisation
- Learning more about mental health issues
- Understanding the law relation to HR

Sounding Board

These sessions were launched in 2022 following feedback from Providers who said that they would appreciate 'individual' time with industry professional(s) to seek their knowledge and advice. The two topics included:

- Fundraising;
- Organisation Development

In total, six sessions were held involving 6 providers. Providers initially accessed a 30-minute session, with further follow-up support provided by their matched Sounding Board expert as required.

Webinars and Peer to Peer Virtual Support Forum

Throughout Year 2, monthly Webinars continued to be delivered and connected providers to topics of interest. These monthly sessions became well established with regular attendance from voluntary sector providers. The topics of these sessions were varied and decided around the needs of individuals and organisations taking part.

In addition, Partners delivered their own in-house sessions, tailored for the Programme. This adapted delivery of Webinars included:

- Business Chemistry (Deloitte)
- Mental Health First Aid Training (MHFA England)
- Making a Personal Plan (Salesforce)

Impact for Providers

In order to assess the overall impact of the MHSP and the achievement of the planned objectives, we have:

- Captured quantitative and qualitative feedback from grant recipients through a reporting form;
- Held interviews with voluntary sector organisations who have received funding, accessed private sector volunteer support and/or participated in the webinars;
- Held interviews with Private Sector Partners
- Participated in a group discussion with the Governing Body; and
- Undertaken interviews with the project team.

We have set out in the following sub-sections the extent to which our research has demonstrated the impact of the MHSP on providers' sustainability. Our analysis covers both years of pilot, covering potential outcomes such as:

- Organisations have had better access to support to improve knowledge, systems and processes;

- Organisations have been more able to achieve impact; and
- Organisations have been more able to continue delivering services, grow, and sustain themselves

It has not been possible to fully evaluate the Helpline Grants Fund, due to only one grant recipient completing their grant and providing a monitoring form at the time of writing. We have however been able to explore some of the impact of this fund through engagement with a beneficiary organisation via an interview.

Organisations have better access to support to improve knowledge, systems and processes

In order to assess the extent to which this outcome has been achieved, we have particularly focused on the delivery of the peer support forums, the webinars, the sounding board and toolkit. We have used direct consultation with provider organisations, staff and private sector partners to identify whether the activities have led to:

- Increased skills of individuals within VCSE organisations; and
- Organisations better able to improve their systems and processes.

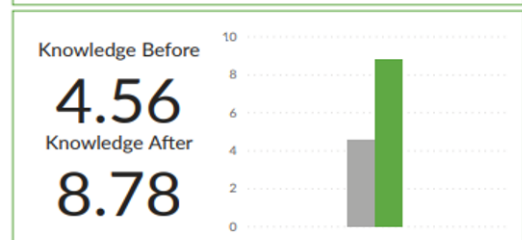
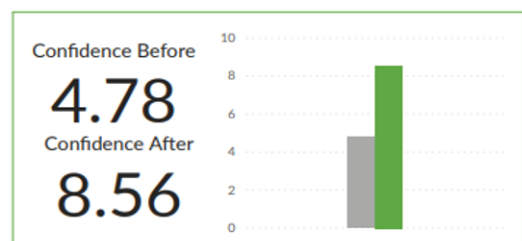
Webinars & Toolkit Sessions

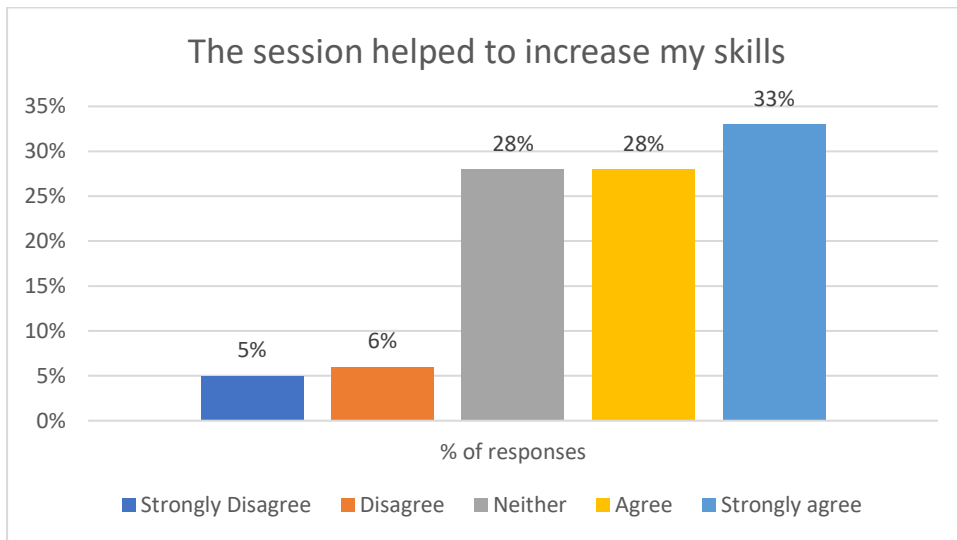
In Year One, some information had been collected through a Zoom Poll about the impact of the webinars on participants' confidence and knowledge about the subjects. This information suggested a significant improvement in both areas as is demonstrated in the chart below.

We have also had some feedback from 21 people who attended the webinars during Years 1 and 2.

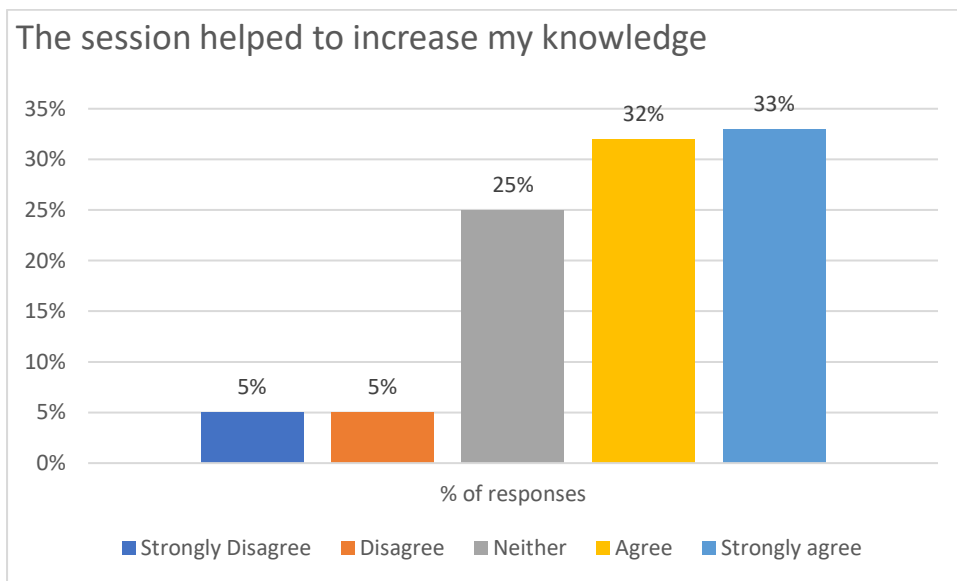
We have outlined their responses in the charts below but in summary the majority of those who provided feedback felt that the webinars had:

- Increased their skills;
- Increased their knowledge;
- Found it a good use of their time;

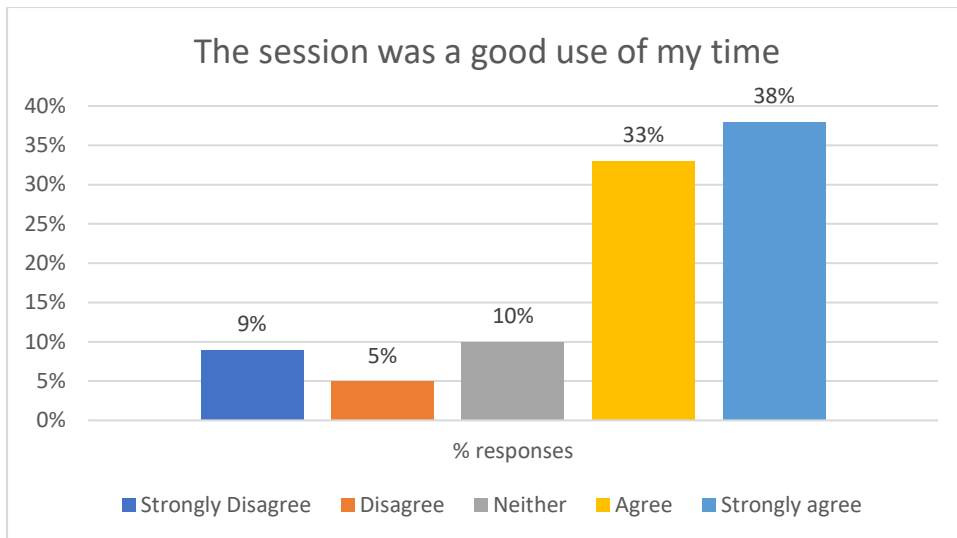




"I left today's meeting feeling seen and heard and that means a lot to me. You both are amazing mentors...you encouraged me, understood my business values and highlighted my strengths. Any doubts or uncertainties I had today have been removed all thanks to you." – Donelle Grant, The Brave Project CIC



Amazing course!! It has helped me learn so much in relation to mental health that I can now take back to my workplace. – Anon, MHFA Webinar



Those providing feedback also indicated that what they found particularly useful about these sessions were:

- Being given the space and opportunity to explore relevant issues with others who have found workable solutions;
- Being able to benefit from the learning and experience of other people in the group; and
- Having access to a broad range of knowledge from industry experts from the private sector.
- Being able to share experiences and concerns with other leaders.
- Being able to have an outlet for frustrations and worries without burdening organization teams.
- Feeling supported and listened to
- Having access to new learning and new knowledge

During the latter stages of the MHSP pilot, The Association invited additional voluntary and private sector partners to run a number of webinars too, covering things such as relationship-led fundraising, grant fundraising and mental health first aid. It is clear from the feedback received that these sessions were found to be more beneficial due to having been delivered by organisations with experience of the sector. Providers reported finding these relevant and relatable to their situations and felt more able to readily implement their new learning in their operations.

[The webinar was] extremely [relevant], it was as if they knew our organisation personally – Anon, Grant Fundraising Webinar

Peer Support Forums

Our discussions with those who had attended the Peer Support Forum sessions found that they felt these were particularly useful during the pandemic. Individuals highlighted the huge challenges their organisations had faced in meeting the scale of

demand in the sector and that they had often felt overwhelmed during the initial waves of the pandemic. The Peer Support Forum had provided them with a vital resource which enabled them to learn from the experiences of others and share their own experiences in return. Examples of the different benefits the Forum offered include:

- Being able to talk to other service providers and learn from them;
- Having the chance to explore a range of different topics and ideas;
- Networking and building new connections with other services outside of their own geographic area;
- Increasing access to training opportunities;
- Feeling able to contribute to the sector;
- Opportunities created for supervision and support for charity leaders;
- Creating a platform for collective voices – over the longer term this could lead to collaborations and policy influence; and
- Being able to meet new people who had similar experiences helped to reduce feelings of isolation.

*I really enjoyed the discussion and am looking forward to future Peer Support meetings. Thanks so much for the support you are giving us, we are excited for the potential and grateful for the connection and way you're behind us. – **Andy Freeman, Space to Breathe CIC***

Organisations are more able to achieve impact

To assess this outcome, we have focused on the support provided through the Mental Health Sustainability Fund.

We have used the following indicators to assess this outcome:

- Organisations reporting increased impact following grant award;
- Organisations reporting achievement of strategic objectives;
- Organisations reporting being able to reach more or new groups of beneficiaries; and
- Organisations reporting increased impact for beneficiaries.

As of 31st August 2022, 50 organisations had returned their grant reporting form, with one organisation being a recipient of a grant from the Helpline Fund. The remainder from the Helpline Fund, are still delivering their projects and will report on their achievements at the end of their 12 months funding period.

In reviewing the grant reporting forms, we have found that the Fund's impact has been significant. The MHSP was able to provide grants to small and medium sized organisations at a pivotal time.

Funding enabled organisations to deliver:

- Counselling sessions
- Trauma informed services and support for vulnerable groups
- Wellbeing sessions and activities in schools and communities
- Peer mentoring programmes
- Targeted mental health support for children and young people
- Helpline support

In the table below, we have outlined the responses from grant recipients about the impact they feel they have experienced.

Area of impact	No impact	Some impact	High impact	Not applicable	Number of people
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have had greater access to opportunities	0% (0)	6% (3)	80% (39)	14% (7)	15,200
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions feel more connected and included	0% (0)	12% (6)	80% (40)	8% (4)	23,185
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions live healthier and more fulfilling lives	0% (0)	24% (12)	60% (30)	16% (8)	26,921
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have increased resilience	0% (0)	24% (12)	70% (35)	6% (3)	22,051
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have increased independence	0% (0)	22% (11)	51% (25)	27% (13)	17,194
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have improved wellbeing and mental health	2% (1)	12% (6)	84% (42)	2% (1)	29,825
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have been better able to cope with Covid restrictions	0% (0)	26% (13)	60% (30)	14% (7)	28,487
People with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have	4% (2)	15% (7)	56% (27)	25% (12)	15,231

Area of impact	No impact	Some impact	High impact	Not applicable	Number of people
better access to sustainable, long-term support					

As we can see from the data above, most recipients reported impact across a range of different outcomes areas. The size of beneficiary cohorts reported per outcome ranged from 15,200 to 29,825.

The work has made a real difference:

- **86%** of recipients reported that the grant had significant impact in enabling them to provide greater access to opportunities for people with mental health needs
- **84%** of recipients believing the grant had significant impact in enabling people with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions to have improved wellbeing and mental health.
- **80%** of recipients believing the grant had significant impact in enabling people with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions feel more connected and included
- **70%** of recipients believing the grant had significant impact in enabling people with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions have increased resilience

There were somewhat lower scores for other outcomes which may reflect the fact that these may be outside the scope of what may be realistically achieved with a small grant over 12 months. For example:

- **60%** of recipients reported that the grant had significant impact on the ability of people with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions to live healthier and more fulfilling lives
- **51%** of recipients reported that the grant had a significant impact on the independence of people with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions
- **60%** of recipients reported that the grant had enabled people with/at risk of mental health needs/conditions to be better able to cope with Covid restrictions
- **56%** of grant recipients reported that the grant had enabled people with/at risk of mental health needs to have better access to sustainable, long-term support

"We're really pleased with how our collaboration has gone and have already noticed success in our aim of expanding our reach to diverse communities." **Grant Recipient**

"I called the helpline when I found out that my twin brother is dying of cancer. My biggest fear is that he does not think that I care. The volunteer I spoke to helped me realise that he knows I love him, as I have often told him in the past, and that being a twin means there is an enduring close bond. I live on my own and I rarely see anyone, so having someone kind to speak to on the phone meant such a lot to me." **End beneficiary of a grant recipient**

Organisations have been more able to continue delivering services, grow, and sustain themselves

We asked grant recipients to indicate in their grant reporting form whether the grant had enabled their organisations to be more sustainable and resilient and if so, in what ways. Their responses are provided in the table below.

The grant has enabled my organisation to be more sustainable and resilient because it has enabled us to...	Yes	No	Not sure
Meet the needs of people during the pandemic	94% (47)	2% (1)	4% (2)
Improve the quality of our services and support	92% (45)	6% (3)	2% (1)
Continue delivering our frontline services	88% (44)	10% (5)	2% (1)
Adapt to delivering services and support online	88% (44)	12% (6)	0% (0)
Reach more and/or different groups of people	86% (43)	10% (5)	4% (2)
Improve our knowledge and skills amongst staff and volunteers	86% (43)	12% (6)	2% (1)
Implement new technology	84% (42)	14% (7)	2% (1)
Improve our website/social media communications	67% (29)	28% (12)	5% (2)
Improve evidence of impact and/or our ability to evaluate services	54% (27)	34% (17)	0% (6)
Improve our marketing approaches and branding	52% (26)	38% (19)	10% (5)
Improve our ability to comply with legal requirements	42% (21)	40% (20)	18% (9)

The grant recipients clearly felt that the grants have made a significant difference to their organisation's resilience and sustainability. For example:

- 94% have reported that the grant enabled them to continue to meet the needs of people during the pandemic;
- 92% reported improved quality of services and support;
- 88% reported improved ability to adapt to delivering services online and to continue to deliver frontline services;
- 86% reported being better able to reach more and different groups of people
- 84% reported improved ability to implement new technology;

*“Just a brief message to thank [facilitators] once again for the very helpful training you provided, and to let you know that I have submitted our organisation’s application to join TrustLaw this afternoon” - **Roslyn Okumu, Rahab***

There were some areas where the grants had less tangible impact, this is most likely because these areas were not a priority for the organisations and outside the scope of the fund. For example:

- 42% reported improved ability to comply with legal requirements;
- 52% reported improved marketing approaches and branding;
- 54% reported improved ability to evidence impact and evaluate services;

The ultimate impact of things like webinars, peer support forums and other resources on an organisation’s ability to grow, develop and sustain themselves can be less tangible in the short term. There may also be other counter-factual aspects which also influence the growth and development of an organisation – such as the availability of opportunities for growth in the external environment for example.

We can consider the extent to which organisations have been able to identify short term benefits that they feel will strengthen their growth and development in the future. The interviews held with providers and the monitoring data produced by the project suggests that those accessing organisation support felt that these interventions:

- Helped them to plan and implement new strategies in things like fundraising, marketing, digital services
- Enabled them to strengthen their approaches to workplace wellbeing and thus keep their staff happier and healthier at work
- Provided the space and opportunity for them to discuss “bumps in the road,” identifying solutions to problems
- Removed the barriers to growth and development which limited capacity and limited access to knowledge and expertise can create

*Knowing that you are sat with other people who feel just like you, is priceless because although locally there is good voluntary sector [connection], lots of meetings with other CEOs but don’t have same purpose as the forum. The forum is much needed support for smaller voluntary organisations. Having that place to bring anything up and that people would get it. – **Anon, about our Peer Support Forum***

Systems Impact

As part of this final evaluation, we wanted to explore some of the MHSP's wider impacts and consider the extent to which the model has had an impact more widely within the Association and the system overall.

We have considered here the findings of our qualitative research which has included a group session with the Governing Body, interviews with the MHSP team, private sector partners and Member organisations involved in delivering some of the support.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

It is important to remember that the project was developed just as new understandings about institutional and structural racism were being appreciated as a result of the death of George Floyd in the USA, the Black Lives Matter protests and the inequalities exposed by Covid-19. The pandemic also placed the survival of small, minority-led organisations at risk. It was in recognition of the need to support these, that the project was purposefully designed to test new ways of reducing inequalities and addressing some of the barriers organisations faced.

Overall, the MHSP worked with 23 organisations led by people from minoritised communities, representing some 22% of the cohort. These organisations have benefitted from increased access to cash and non-cash resources focused on strengthening their resilience and sustainability. They have also been connected to industry experts and leading organisations within the private sector too – connections they may not have had access to so readily without the MHSP's work. The kind of support provided by the MHSP has undoubtedly acted as a potential lifeline for some of those participating.

Furthermore, the MHSP has also demonstrated some potential for wider and longer term influence on wider equalities practice. For example, the private sector partners interviewed for this evaluation told us that:

- Involvement in the MHSP had improved their understanding about the needs of organisations led by minoritised communities;
- They intended to develop their CSR practices in order to be more inclusive for smaller, minority-led groups;

A great example of how the MHSP has had wider and unexpected influence is to be found within the Association itself. Our discussions with the team over the project's lifetime have highlighted the fact that the MHSP has enabled the Association to have better engagement and opportunities for dialogue with organisations led by under-represented groups. In gaining new insights about the barriers faced by minoritised

communities, the Association has sought to integrate this new learning through the implementation of an intersectional approach across all of its operations. This means that inclusivity for all groups is put front and centre in all strategy development, service design and human resources planning. The Association is now better able to reach, include and empower people from minoritised communities.

Informing policy and practice

By bringing partners together through mechanisms like the peer support network, the Association has captured wider system trends and issues experienced directly by small organisations. This information has been used by the Association to lobby for wider support and to influence policy development. Indeed, the Association has been able to directly engage and involve the MHSP providers in this process, amplifying their voice in discussions with the UK Government. Organisations involved in the MHSP have also been connected with wider strategic forums also seeking to address health inequalities too such as the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

In 2022, the Association worked with MHSP providers to submit a response to a consultation on a proposed Mental Health Plan to be developed by the Department of Health and Social Care. The Association was able to use the learning gained from its experience of delivering the MHSP to highlight:

- Inequalities and systemic challenges for providers and communities
- Best practice
- Unmet need within communities

Building capacity and sustainability in the sector

A key issue for smaller, grassroots organisations, especially those led by and representing minoritised or marginalised communities, is lack of capacity and lack of sustainability. This is a cyclical problem too in that having limited capacity and poor sustainability means that organisations find it harder and harder to implement the operational solutions that can address these issues. Infrastructure support (in the form of funding and organisational development) can often also be under resourced too and this can perpetuate these problems still further.

The MHSP has offered a more holistic approach which has provided some funding designed to address capacity issues alongside a broad range of resources, support and expertise. Taken together, the MHSP has worked with 106 organisations with the purpose of building their capacity and sustainability. Our consultation and review of data has shown that these organisations have been better able to manage the major challenges posed by the pandemic. The support offered provided a blend of

immediate-needs support as well as enabling long term development – organisations have used the grants for training staff, gaining new accreditations, developing new models of online delivery which will help them diversify, secure contracts and develop new customer bases.

Strengthening access to funding

Whilst there are thousands of voluntary and corporate bodies established to fund the VCSE, there remains a critical gap between these funders and the small, grassroots organisations targeted by the MHSP. This gap is a result of significant barriers to available funding:

- Corporate support programmes often developed at strategic levels between national bodies which excludes access for small, grassroots organisations;
- Application processes can be complex and onerous to complete;
- Minority-led organisations can lack capacity and resources to develop the necessary relationships with corporate organisations;
- There can be issues of mistrust between smaller organisations and large corporates – organisations in different sectors often do not understand each other or recognise shared objectives;

The MHSP has evidently created a new model for using the influence of a large, national body like the Association to lobby for and secure corporate & voluntary support for the VCSE mental health sector. The MHSP has drawn together over £181,949 in funding and dispersed this across England, across 76 small grassroots organisations who would otherwise have been unlikely to be able to access funding from the kinds of corporate bodies engaged in this project. Demographic analysis of these funds shows that this funding has reached the following primary beneficiary groups as follows:

Beneficiary groups	Number of organisations funded
People with addiction	1 (1%)
Ex-offenders	1 (1%)
Individuals with dementia and their carers	1 (1%)
People who have disordered eating	1 (1%)
Individuals who have been bereaved	2 (3%)
Women and gender equality	3 (4%)
Those who have physical and learning disabilities (including Autism)	4 (6%)
Parents and families	7 (9%)
Children and young people	12 (16%)
General/Other	21 (28%)
People from minoritised communities	22 (29%)
Total	76

Case Study - Muslim Youth Helpline

The Muslim Youth Helpline supports young Muslims across the UK. It was founded by three young people. It has a small team with a large impact. During the covid lockdowns there was a 313% increase in calls.

Support from the Association was what enabled them to get through the tough times during the pandemic. The Director benefitted from informal mentoring sessions through The Association. It gave them a space to offload – being allowed to be honest.

The Muslim Youth Helpline used funding to get helpline staff trained in suicide calls because they had seen a rise in calls on suicide or suicide ideology. They also received funding towards costs of helpline accreditation. The team found peer learning sessions to be a highlight.

*"I've made a lot of friends through the mentoring sessions with other organisations."
"The Programme is amazing, and the team are amazing."*

Private Sector Partners

Overall, the breadth of support from private sector partners was not as anticipated. At the outset, the MHSP team sought to engage broadly with many private sector partners but ultimately worked with a smaller core group of organisations. As a result, understanding the impact of the MHSP for private sector partners is limited by the smaller cohort size of organisations involved. However, over the lifetime of this project we have been able to consult directly with 4 companies through online discussions and written feedback.

This direct consultation has highlighted that some of the private sector partners involved in the MHSP feel that they have been able to benefit too. They have referred to things such as:

- Their own increased understanding about the needs of small, grassroots organisations and the minoritised communities they lead;
- Increased ability to strengthen their own Corporate Social Responsibility programmes and offer more varied opportunities for their employees;
- Improved engagement with minority-led organisations;
- Opportunities to re-evaluate their own practice, particularly in relation to EDI;
- Increased ability for participating organisations to offer CSR opportunities related to the mental health sector;
- Improved learning and development within their own organisations. For example, one partner involved in developing and running a webinar session told us that this process has led to them re-evaluating their own messaging and amending their own approaches as a result.

Challenges

Unsurprisingly, the MHSP pilot was not without its challenges. These were mainly experienced in the first year of the project when the project focused more on direct engagement with and involvement with a broader group of private sector partners. The team found that the level of support from the private sector was not as anticipated. This was largely because of:

- Some private sector partners pledging support but not translating this into practical action;
- Some private sector partners being unable to be as flexible as the MHSP required in the ways they delivered their support – this was a result of some organisations having onerous internal systems for due diligence, having their own structured approaches which did not align well with the MHSP, some organisations not having teams as invested in the cause as others;
- Some private sector partners recognising the value of being involved in a programme like this in terms of their own reputation and image, but unable to commit the time, resources and effort needed to drive this work through within their own organisations;
- The team found that the level of relationship management needed to develop work with the private sector was challenging and more intensive than expected. Developing corporate relationships can take many months, has to happen at peer-peer levels and requires resources;
- Lack of understanding on all sides about the time and resources required within the matched volunteer aspect of the programme. Some voluntary sector partners found that they were unable to benefit from this part of the scheme because they did not have the capacity to dedicate to such an intensive and extended programme of support. Similarly, the team encountered a number of incidences where private sector partners themselves had found the level of support required from a provider was more than they expected or had capacity to provide;

The latter part of the MHSP has run more smoothly, particularly because the team have learned from the first stage and adapted the model. No longer focused as much on securing corporate support through volunteering, the team have drawn on the expertise and resources of the private sector partners in other ways such as through the delivery of funding, webinars, toolkits and learning forums.

The grant funding programmes themselves have also had their own challenges too. These have included:

- There are inevitable inefficiencies associated with the management of a small grants process and this can be off-putting to potential applicants;
- Some applicants felt the overall process was onerous for the size of grants made available;

- In the first year, there were more ineligible applications in the first round due to the brief and specification lacking some clarity;

There were challenges in other areas, such as:

- In enabling the delivery of organisation support (webinars, toolkit, peer support etc), the team also found that it could take longer time than expected to develop work in response to requests made by members;
- Initially, Toolkit sessions were planned around 2 hours of delivery. However, engagement for these was low to begin with because Provider organisations were unable to commit to more than 1 hour. The team worked around this and shortened the sessions, as well as making them available for round-the-clock viewing through the Member's Area, with additional activities to be undertaken offline incorporated into the sessions. This worked well, but inevitably had an impact on the capacity of the team to deliver these as more planning and development work was required;
- The team have identified that they have over-relied on a small number of Private Sector Partners and Providers who have been willing to deliver a wide range of support;
- There has been some limited negative feedback about the content of some online sessions not being adequately adapted to the needs of the participants;
- The MHSP has had to pay external facilitators to deliver some sessions where there has been insufficient engagement from partners within the network. Where this has happened, the sessions have taken longer to plan and budget for and this has delayed delivery at times;

Case Study - Our Time

Our Time supports children whose parents have a mental illness. They received some funding during the second lockdown to help them to support during covid. There were extra costs due to running sessions differently.

In March 2020, they were aware that they couldn't run face to face sessions and that they would have to quickly set up remote support. They closed their office, which saved them some money on rent. This has pushed them into a much more digital way of working which has been good. Internally the organisation has benefitted in so far, they have reduced expenditure, continued to support families and have created a network of delivery partners which they didn't have before.

Our Time received £1,000 funding to support one of their workshops which was about to run out of money. The workshop benefitted 40 people. Our Time have found the MHSF very supportive through the support they have provided in creating a network of non-financial support has been very valuable. They have been introduced to BUPA Foundation and received guidance on corporate fundraising.

“Great fund, very supportive people”

Subsequently Our Time have accessed support through a Sounding Board session where they attended to discuss corporate fundraising avenues and to devise their

pitch. Our Time were also introduced to Bupa Foundation in relation to corporate fundraising.

"It was really useful and inspiring. Thank you [Sounding Board panel member] for sharing your experience and insight in such a generous way. This has inspired me to make a big push on [corporate fundraising]" – Dympna Cunnane, CEO

Critical Success Factors

Member-led support

Whilst the project was originally designed to involve private sector partners in the delivery of organisation support, during the first year, the MHSP also began to involve members of the Association more directly. Organisations such as the Samaritans, a coalition partner, have delivered online workshops on a range of topics. In addition, MHSP participants have contributed to the programme, sharing their experience and knowledge through the peer support forums.

Our consultation with providers demonstrated that this approach has been highly beneficial. Feedback from these workshops has been positive and those we interviewed highlighted these sessions as being relevant and relatable.

The Association's role in the sector has been of clear influence here. It has undertaken a brokering role, connecting the MHSP and its providers with highly experienced and well-connected leadership teams within the mental health voluntary sector. CEOs from small, grassroots organisations (often volunteers themselves) have accessed the knowledge and support of these nationally recognised organisations.

Not only has this approach been of clear direct benefit to the MHSP providers. It has also been a determining factor in the project's ability to meet its core aims. Utilising member contributions in this way has ensured the project could respond more flexibly to the needs of providers and sustain the organisation support element of the project even as the private sector volunteer element was scaled back.

Association membership and associated benefits

All Providers welcomed through the MHSP were given complimentary membership to the Association. This has given them access to:

- Learning Portal;
- Webinars;

- Events;
- Weekly, monthly and quarterly bulletins;
- Members only Forum;
- Opportunities for influencing policy within the Association and the wider mental health sector;

The providers interviewed reported satisfaction with the additional resources provided by the membership. They felt that membership offered them access to development and funding opportunities that they would have otherwise missed. Indeed, the interviewees felt that the MHSP and wider Association team were proactive in bringing these opportunities to their attention, such as through sharing information about funding they felt would align with their organisation priorities.

Listening and Flexibility

The willingness to engage and respond accordingly was a significant success factor for this project. The team reported to us that they were not restricted to delivering the programme in any specific way and that this gave them the freedom and time to listen to providers, reflect on project progress and develop alternative methods of delivery when needed.

The MHSP was initially designed after the Association had engaged with and listened to members and their concerns about the impact of the Covid-19 on the mental health sector. This highlighted a need to provide grant funding and organisation support and underpinned the careful development of the MHSP in 2020.

Throughout the project, the MHSP team continued to listen to providers and the private sector partners involved. They have learned about the challenges associated with the private sector-led volunteering programme and implemented new ways for private sector partners to support providers. They learned about the challenges that organisations providing helplines were experiencing (both in terms of increased demand and difficulties accessing funding) and developed a ring-fenced programme in partnership with BUPA. The MHSP also responded flexibly to the changing capacity within organisations as the pandemic moved into new phases by providing a toolkit that could be accessed by providers at their own convenience.

A broad and influential network of partners

The Association's pre-existing relationships with organisations such as the City Mental Health Alliance (CMHA) were critical in the development of the MHSP. This partnership brokered the engagement of a much broader network of private sector partners. One of the things that makes the MHSP unique is the profile and influence of the organisations that the team were able to bring on board to join the governing

body, provide funds and offer support. Partnership between CMHA and this wider network had some major benefits for the MHSP:

- It enabled the programme to be developed and implemented quickly, which was imperative given the urgent demands placed upon the sector by the pandemic;
- Delivering across a network of potential providers and private sector partners enabled scale across England;
- It enabled the distribution of funding across 76 organisations;
- The partnerships provided seconded staff during the first year of the project, representing a significant investment;
- Having access to this network has enabled the MHSP to have ready access to a pool of experts in a range of areas – this expertise has been useful in leveraging resources for the team and for the delivery of organisation support

Senior Programme Officer

The Association recruited an experienced individual to specifically deliver the programme and ensure sufficient resource and capacity was in place.

This role has been key to the success of the Programme. They have been instrumental in liaising between private sector partners and providers, as well as ensuring that improvements to the Programme were implemented quickly and efficiently.

“Very professional, very clear. We never had to chase up on anything. They have been outstanding.” **Private Sector Partner**

“An excellent team of staff” **Private Sector Partner**

The feedback from provider organisations about the Senior Programme Officer and the MHSP team was incredibly positive. Organisations noted that:

- The Association team were amazing;
- They remember things about individual organisations;
- They value you as an organisation;
- They flag up funding opportunities;
- They go above and beyond - they want organisations to flourish;

“We felt a sense of trust and confidence in their work. Before I knew it there were lots of things that The Association were doing that were in my diary.”

This role has been critical to the project. The MHSP brings together very different stakeholder groups (small and large organisations delivering mental health services, private sector partners, VCSE infrastructure organisations). Each of these stakeholder groups have their own needs, motivations for involvement, their own sets of challenges. Without appropriate facilitation, there would be a risk that the needs of the providers could be overwhelmed by the expectations of the larger organisations involved.

In delivering the MHSP, the Senior Programme Officer has acted as an honest broker between these diverse stakeholder groups, listening to and developing the project as the operating environment changed. Crucially, in working closely with and advocating for the provider organisations the Senior Programme Officer was able to ensure that their needs remained paramount and were consistently supported.

Looking Forward

It is apparent that the MHSP provided significant interventions which contributed to providers' overall resilience and sustainability. The key outcomes for providers involved in the project have been met and this is a huge achievement given the speed at which the programme needed to be developed, the scale of demand and the very uncertain and challenging operating environment for the sector.

Discussions with the MHSP team has demonstrated the different ways in which the MHSP has evolved:

- Phase 1: Volunteering with some funding
- Phase 2: Funding and Learning support
- Phase 3: Toolkit and Peer Support

Although never originally intended, the MHSP delivered 3 rounds of grant funding very successfully, with £238k being distributed in total. All this funding has been provided to small, grassroots organisations, many of whom were led by people from Minoritised communities.

A target of 100 VCSE organisations to be supported was established. At the time of publication, 106 organisations received volunteer, learning or grant funding support from the programme. Therefore, the target number of 100, has been exceeded by 6%.

In drawing together private sector and voluntary sector expertise and channelling this into communities that are under-represented and under-supported, the MHSP has developed a new model for infrastructure support. Furthermore, building in the peer support elements and opportunities for listening to and engaging members in the development of activity, practice and policy, further strengthens the model, creating an ecosystem of funding and support which is not delivered elsewhere in the sector.

Communities across England are still facing huge challenges in accessing mental health support, with demand outstripping supply and waiting times for statutory and voluntary services extensive. The current economic crisis is only likely to drive up demand further as people's mental health worsens in the face of poverty, unemployment and uncertainty. As further demands are placed on mental health providers (and indeed as new organisations start up in response), there will continue to be a need to support the sustainability and development of these organisations.

The MHSP has demonstrated that its alternative approach enables sustainability to be created at sector level rather than in just single organisations. As such, adopting the learning from this programme can be useful in the Association’s continued work with smaller, grassroots organisations.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: It is recommended that in developing future resources, offers and products, it will be advantageous to reflect upon the self-identified needs of the grant recipients in their forms. We asked them to indicate the kinds of support they wanted from the MHSP and to rank these in terms of the most-least important. We purposefully did not ask about grant funding as we felt able to assume this would be of high importance to all organisations. The results are in the table below:

Support Needs identified by grant recipients to help improve sustainability of their organisation	Most Important (1)	2	3	4	Least Important (5)
Webinars – marketing, fundraising, evaluation etc.	32% (16)	28% (14)	26% (13)	2% (1)	12% (6)
1-1 mentoring	36% (18)	14% (7)	28% (14)	8% (4)	14% (7)
Sector news and information	24% (12)	28% (14)	24% (12)	12% (6)	12% (6)
Peer support forum	18% (9)	32% (16)	22% (11)	16% (8)	12% (6)
Networking events	16% (8)	24% (12)	22% (11)	16% (8)	22% (11)

Out of 50 respondents:

- 30 (60%) rated webinars as most important or important
- 25 (50%) rated 1-1 mentoring as most important or important
- 26 (52%) rated Sector news and information as most important or important
- 25 (50%) rated peer support forums as most important or important
- 20 (40%) rated networking events as being most important or important

Other support needs identified by grant recipients were access to business growth advice, counselling provision and signposting to other organisations that could help in delivering and/or expanding services.

Recommendation Two: Ensure that the Association's monitoring and evaluation plan aligns with the learning from this project. For example:

- Implementing approaches for gathering more information about the direct impact on end beneficiaries of the organisations supported by the Association. It is important that seeking this information is undertaken in a way which is not onerous for providers, such as by asking individuals to provide pre-existing case studies and photographs with their reports. The team could also consider funding some more detailed research with a sample of some providers to gain more insights into the impact on beneficiaries.
- There have not been many feedback forms completed after the online sessions. Consideration should be given to how best to encourage attendees to complete this feedback or using polls and annual questionnaires. It may be appropriate to consider ways of incentivising people to respond as well, such as by providing a Prize Draw or something similar

Recommendation Three: Embed Lived Experience

It is understood that the Association is in the process of developing a Lived Experience Advisory Group at the time of writing. Connecting with this group in order to develop future grant rounds, resources and forms of support will be essential. It is highly recommended that co-production activities with this group and other stakeholders is carried out as early as possible.

It would be useful too, to consider developing webinars, toolkit resources and topics at peer-peer forums around this as many providers find it hard to implement relevant approaches.

Recommendation Four: Continue to develop the network

The same Private Sector Partners have contributed a vast amount to the Programme. As the Association continues to develop resources for its Members, consideration should be given expanding the pool of providers available.

Recommendation Five: Continue to promote Workplace Wellbeing

One of the major ironies of the mental health sector is that many of its employees, volunteers and trustees fail to look after their own wellbeing. This often begins at senior level, with CEOs and leaders not having time and space for their own reflective practice and supervision. As we have identified in this and the interim report, a common challenge for CEOs has been a sense of isolation and stress. Providing the peer-peer forum as well as webinars and toolkit resources focused on CEO wellbeing as well as staff wellbeing would be a good means of supporting frontline organisations whose staff are often at risk of burnout. Maintaining this focus on wellbeing should be a key focus for Member support.

Recommendation Six: Maintain Grant Funding Rounds

Organisations will continue to need funding in order to grow and develop. Now that the team have developed some expertise in this area, it would be good to see the Association build out from the 3 grant funds it has developed.

There are strong arguments for delivering ring fenced funding for specific groups of beneficiaries, particularly those who are already systemically disadvantaged – people from minoritised backgrounds, young people, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, carers, for example. It may be worth considering developing a ring-fenced approach focused on specific groups or indeed specific activities, aligned with the Association's priorities as these could home in on key areas of inequality.

It is appreciated that the scale of any grant funding will be determined by the availability of funds secured by the Association. However, it can be incredibly difficult for new organisations and small grassroots organisations to secure longer term funding. The team could consider developing both a small and large/multi-year grants process specifically for new organisations and small groups.

As mentioned above, it will be important to co-produce the grants focus and application process with mental health providers. It would be useful to test application systems and specifications with providers as well in order to ensure that they are transparent, accessible and easy to use.

Acknowledgements

The team at Charity Fundraising Ltd are extremely grateful to the input from The Association' staff, Voluntary Sector mental health service provider organisations and Private Sector Partners. Their support has been invaluable to enable us to produce this Interim Evaluation Report on the Mental Health Sustainability Programme.

*This has been transformational, supporting our whole family to cope with lockdowns, stress, pressure and anxiety of the pandemic. My children looked forward to the sessions each week and really made a difference to how they coped. That you so much for the wonderful kit that you delivered, they felt important, cared for and had things to use when the course finished." **End beneficiary of a grant recipient***

This external evaluation was undertaken by:



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