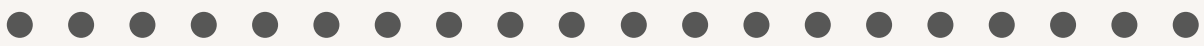




The Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on Mental Health



August 2024



How the Cost-of-Living Crisis is Impacting Mental Health: Key Insights and Implications

Examining the context:

Over the past decade, austerity measures have inflicted profound economic hardship on communities and individuals, exacerbating systemic inequalities and leading to the closure of crucial support services in health, education, and community engagement. This has triggered a sharp rise in poverty and an increase in mental health issues across society. The COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded these financial strains, disproportionately affecting marginalised and vulnerable groups throughout the United Kingdom. The ongoing economic crisis has not only undermined the wellbeing of the most at-risk populations, but has also deteriorated living and working conditions for many, pushing an alarming number into poverty and escalating mental health challenges. MQ highlights[1] specific factors as contributing to the cost-of-living crisis, which include rising inflation, increased costs for essential items, declining disposable income, fuel poverty, higher taxes, and the reduction of Universal Credit. Given that the UK economy fell into a recession in the latter half of 2023[2], it is vital to understand and break the cycle of poverty and the detrimental impact it has on mental health, to empower communities and drive towards positive and equitable mental health experiences and outcomes.

Poverty rates are increasing, significantly impacting mental health:

Data demonstrates that the rates of poverty are increasing across the UK. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that in 2021/22, over 14.4 million people in the UK were living in poverty, which is more than one in five individuals (22%)[3]. Their analysis suggests that poverty has increased, nearing levels seen before the pandemic. Additionally, the Resolution Foundation predicts that absolute poverty (the severe deprivation of basic needs) will rise by 300,000 people from 11.7 million in 2023/24, to 12.0 million in 2024/25. This would mean an 18.0% poverty rate, the same as pre-pandemic levels[4]. The rise in poverty and this current economic crisis, has led to a notable increase in food insecurity, precarious employment, income inequality, a sharp rise in energy bills, and a surge in homelessness and poverty. Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shared that: In October 2023, around 2.8 million of the poorest fifth of households (47%) were in arrears with their household bills or behind on scheduled lending repayments. As well as this, 4.2 million households (72%) were going without essentials and 3.4 million households (58%) reported not having enough money for food[5]. Research shows there are many ways that depriving populations across the UK, is negatively affecting their mental health.



Economic crises often lead to poor mental health

Studies have also shown that mental health is especially worsened during economic downturns and crises. Research conducted by MQ [6] indicates that negative experiences with mental health are common during economic crises. A prominent example of how economic crisis exacerbated mental health challenges, is the Great Recession of 2007–2009. During the 2007-9 recession, MQ reports there were increased cases of anxiety and depression amongst individuals. According to MQ's research, financial concerns, unemployment, anxiety, and austerity measures are some of the factors that contribute to poor mental health outcomes. MQ has also highlighted that vulnerable groups are disproportionately impacted by economic crises, and groups including young people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, LGBTQ+ people, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and people with disabilities are most likely to be impacted.

The relationship between cost of living and mental health

Evidence demonstrates that the cost-of-living crisis plays a role in worsening existing mental health challenges, provoking mental ill health amongst individuals and intensifying structural inequalities faced by racialised and marginalised communities.

This briefing will explore:

- The impact the cost-of-living crisis has had on people's mental health experiences and outcomes
- The impact the cost-of-living crisis has had within the VCSE sector
- Case studies demonstrating the significance of the cost-of-living crisis and interventions put in place to support communities



The impact the cost-of-living crisis has had on people's mental health experiences and outcomes

Significant strain has been placed on people with pre-existing mental health challenges.

The cost-of-living crisis has had a debilitating effect on people's mental health. Analysis undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which was released in December 2022, found that the rising cost of living has had a disproportionate impact on those with mental health challenges, particularly those with symptoms of depression [7]. During the period between 29th September to 23rd October 2022, ONS data found that around 1 in 6 (16%) adults experienced moderate to severe depressive symptoms. This rate was higher than pre-pandemic levels, which was 10%. The prevalence of moderate to severe depressive symptoms was identified as being higher amongst adults who were economically inactive because of circumstances including: long-term sickness (59%), unpaid carers for 35 or more hours a week (37%), disabled adults (35%), adults in the most deprived areas of England (25%), young adults aged 16 to 29 years (28%) and women (19%).

ONS analysis [8] also disclosed that around 1 in 4 (24%) of respondents reported difficulty in paying their energy bills and experienced moderate to severe depressive symptoms; this statistic is three times higher than those who found it easy to pay their energy bills (9%). Amongst adults who found it difficult to afford their rent or mortgage payments, about 27% reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms. This is twice as high as those who found it easy to afford payments, which stood at 15%. Additionally, about 32% of those experiencing moderate to severe depressive symptoms stated that they had to borrow more money or use more credit than usual in the last month compared to a year ago. This is higher compared to around 18% of those with no or mild depressive symptoms. These findings indicate that the ongoing cost-of-living crisis has intensified financial struggles for individuals with pre-existing mental health challenges.

Research findings from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy in September 2022 [9], further emphasise the negative impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the mental health of individuals with pre-existing challenges and conditions. Their data revealed that 66% of therapists observed that worries about the cost of living were contributing to a decline in their clients' mental wellbeing. Additionally, 61% of therapists reported that their clients were anxious about affording household bills, while 52% noted that financial worries were causing their clients to lose sleep.

A survey conducted by King's College London discovered in July 2023, that 87% of survey respondents with a diagnosed mental health condition, disclosed that the rising cost of living had a negative impact on their mental health. This was significantly higher than the general population, where only 60% of respondents disclosed that the cost-of-living crisis had a slightly or very negative impact on their mental health. [10]



The wider population is also struggling to cope mentally with the cost-of-living crisis, and are likely to present with more serious mental health challenges.

The current cost-of-living crisis is seriously impacting mental health nationwide. In a survey conducted by Mind in October 2023 [11], approximately 1 in 10 individuals (10%) reported developing an eating disorder due to financial strain. Moreover, the crisis is leading to significant mental distress, as shown by Mind's data indicating that people receiving Universal Credit were three times more likely to consider suicide, compared to those not receiving benefits. This research emphasises a worrying pattern: mental health challenges, including thoughts of suicide, are increasing due to the financial strain of the cost of living. As mental health needs surge within the general population, they often manifest as serious challenges that require urgent attention.

Research conducted by the Money and Mental Health Institute in May 2022 [12], affirms the significant impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the general population's mental health. Their data revealed that 6 in 10 (59%) UK adults experienced negative effects on their mental health, including feelings of anxiety, depression, or hopelessness. Furthermore, 1 in 5 adults (21%) admitted to feeling unable to cope due to the increasing cost of living. Similarly, findings from the Mental Health Foundation in November 2022 [13] point out the wide-reaching consequences of the crisis. Their research indicates that 30% of UK adults are experiencing poorer quality sleep, 23% are meeting with friends less frequently, 15% are pursuing hobbies less often, and 12% are exercising less regularly due to the financial strain of the cost of living.

Analysis by King's College London [14] also discovered that the general population's mental health and wellbeing had disproportionately been affected by the cost-of-living crisis. In their November 2022 survey, three out of five individuals (59%) reported that the rise in the cost of living was negatively affecting their mental health. This trend persisted when participants were surveyed again in July 2023, with 60% indicating either a slightly or very negative impact from the cost-of-living crisis. This illustrates how individuals living with mental health challenges have been consistently and adversely affected by the financial strain of the cost-of-living crisis.

A survey conducted by Which? and published in November 2023 [15] also discovered that there has been a decline in the mental health and wellbeing of the general population due to the rising cost of living since the pandemic.

Survey respondents to this research shared that:

- Over a third of UK adults (35%) have suffered severe negative impacts on their social life as rising costs prevent them from seeing friends and family
- A third of people have seen less of their family and friends (31%), which equates to 16 million UK adults, and half have spent more time at home (48%), making them feel lonely and isolated
- Four in 10 (40%) felt more distant from friends and a quarter (25%) faced significant strain in their partner relationships
- Younger adults and people with children at home were more likely to feel distant from friends and had relationship strains with their partner



The impact on community groups

Children and Young People:

For community groups, the cost-of-living crisis has had a disproportionate impact on their mental health. For children and young people, experiencing the cost-of-living crisis has worsened their mental health, exposing them to adverse childhood experiences, that may lead to longer term mental health challenges as they grow older and transition into adulthood.

Research conducted by Barnardos [16] discovered that:

- 54% of parents have been forced to cut back on food spending for their family over the past 12 months.
- 1 in 5 parents said they have struggled to provide sufficient food due to the current cost-of-living crisis, and over a quarter (26%) have said that their child's mental health has worsened due to the situation.
- Parents have admitted resorting to desperate measures, with a quarter (26%) having sold possessions, one in five (20%) having taken on new credit cards, extra debt or a payday loan, and 16 survey respondents have even left pets at rescue centres, due to the rising cost-of-living.

The cost-of-living crisis and experiences of poverty amongst children and young people is harming their mental health, exposing them to conditions that can disrupt their education and life chances, and worsen their physical and mental health outcomes in the long term. Research conducted by Young Minds in August 2022 [17] found that over half (56%) of young people reported feeling worried about the cost of living, rising from 50% in May of 2022. Respondents to Young Mind's survey also reported disruption to daily life, particularly their diet and sleep. Age groups faced specific mental health challenges. For young people from the ages of 20-25, they were likely to feel concerned about money, with 80% always or often worried about earning enough. For children aged 11 years old, 21% had shared that money worries had caused them stress, anxiety, unhappiness, or anger.

For Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities:

The cost-of-living crisis is also having a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities. According to data published by People Like Us in November 2022, [18] 56% of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority workers disclosed feeling despair about the increased cost of living. 41% of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority workers also shared that they are 'worried' that they will lose their job due to rising costs, compared with 27 per cent of those from a White British background. 52 per cent also disclosed that government support will not see them through the next six months, a rate seven per cent higher than their White counterparts.



The impact the cost-of-living crisis has had on the VCSE sector

The cost-of-living crisis has also placed a heavier emotional, financial and resource toll across the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, who deliver critical mental health services to communities. Research conducted by Pro Bono Economics and Nottingham Trent University discovered that [21]:

- In October 2023, 35% of small and medium charities, reported that their finances had deteriorated in the past three months
- More than 55% of small, medium, and large charities shared they were depending on charity reserves to meet their current operating costs
- 59% of small charities disclosed difficulties in managing capacity due to challenges in recruiting volunteers
- 64% of small charities shared that they were able to meet the needs of their beneficiaries.
- 38% of small charities expected their finances to deteriorate soon.
- 57% of all charity employers shared that their staff had been struggling to cope with the cost-of-living crisis

The NHS Providers research [22] into the impact of the cost-of-living crisis emphasises the experiences of NHS staff members. According to their findings, published in September 2022, all respondents expressed concern about the mental, physical, and financial wellbeing of staff due to cost-of-living pressures. Many providers (61%) reported an increase in staff sickness and absence related to mental health issues. More broadly, NHS Providers found a sharp increase in demand for services due to the rising cost of living. The majority (72%) observed a rise in mental health cases linked to stress, debt, and poverty. Trusts also noted that the cost-of-living crisis is prompting staff to seek employment elsewhere; two-thirds (68%) reported a significant or severe impact from staff leaving for other sectors, such as hospitality or retail, where employers offer more competitive terms. This increased turnover is costly for trusts and disrupts their ability to manage operational pressures.



Insights from The Association's membership regarding the cost-of-living crisis

Our members at the Association of Mental Health Providers have candidly shared their personal experiences and insights regarding the impacts of the ongoing cost of living crisis. These include:

- **Delayed Payments and Disruptions:** The cost-of-living crisis has led to significant delays and disruptions in receiving payments for work and grants funded by statutory services. In a distressing example, a member completed a service only to wait for over a year to receive payment, which placed a lot of pressure on both the organisation and its staff.
- **Impact on Staff Wellbeing and Capacity:** The cost-of-living crisis has taken a toll on the wellbeing and capacity of staff members. The persistent demand for services has become challenging to keep up with, impacting the overall effectiveness and resilience of the workforce.
- **Challenges in Providing Timely and Appropriate Care:** Individuals are reaching out to members during times of crisis or when their mental health needs are severe. Such circumstances make it exceedingly difficult for members to offer timely or appropriate care that sufficiently addresses the urgent needs of individuals during a crisis.
- **Resource Constraints and Tight Budgets:** The lack of resources and investments has compelled Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to deliver services to an increasing number of people but on notably tighter budgets. This strain has substantial implications for the quality and extent of support provided.
- **Threatened Organisational Closure:** Many VCSE organisations find themselves in survival mode, confronted with the looming threat of closure. The combination of financial constraints and increased demand has created a precarious environment, threatening the continued existence of crucial mental health support services that address service gaps for many communities.



What are the new government's commitments towards addressing the cost of living crisis?

The new Government has outlined an extensive agenda [23] to address the escalating cost-of-living crisis and the significant challenges surrounding mental health, as detailed in their manifesto and reaffirmed in the King's Speech. A central element of their strategy is a comprehensive approach aimed at reducing financial pressures on households, which will help to address some of the socio-economic determinants of mental ill health. Significantly, the Labour Government's "Plan to Make Work Pay" seeks to enhance job security and wages by eliminating zero-hour contracts, banning fire-and-rehire practices, and implementing a living wage that reflects current living costs.

Labour's approach also addresses the interconnected issues of rising living costs and mental health [24]. Plans include establishing a National Care Service integrated with the NHS to provide consistent, high-quality care with a focus on a 'home first' strategy. This reform aims to ease financial strain on families by streamlining support and improving hospital discharge processes. Additionally, Labour is committed to recruiting 8,500 new mental health professionals and creating 'young futures' hubs to offer targeted support, particularly in schools. These measures are designed to address both the immediate and longer-term impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on health and financial stability.

To further strengthen their commitment and enhance their response to the cost-of-living crisis, the new Government should consider abolishing the two-child benefit cap. Research by the London School of Economics (LSE) in 2023 highlights [25] that this cap disproportionately impacts larger families, worsening child poverty, particularly among those facing higher living costs and ethnic minority households. Affecting 1.5 million children, the cap has aggravated poverty levels, particularly for families with greater needs. Removing this cap would provide essential support to those most affected by the cost-of-living crisis, and align with the Government's broader objectives of reducing financial pressures on families and promoting economic fairness. Addressing this policy gap would significantly enhance the effectiveness of the new government's strategy in tackling both the cost-of-living crisis and its associated mental health problems.

In its pledge to reform the Mental Health Act and recruit additional mental health professionals, the Labour government must prioritise investment in both the recruitment and retention of staff within the VCSE workforce. Particularly in light of the cost-of-living crisis impacting VCSE organisations and their workforce, it is crucial to ensure that the VCSE mental health sector receives equal consideration and investment alongside statutory mental health services.



Recommendations

1. Consistent, Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Support is a Necessity:

- Deliver and invest in programmes that provide consistent and ongoing mental health support tailored to the specific cultural needs of diverse communities. This support should be accessible, linguistically appropriate, and delivered by trained professionals who understand the cultural nuances and sensitivities surrounding mental health and the relationship between money and mental health.
- Collaborate with community organisations and mental health professionals from within the community and who hold lived experience, to develop culturally sensitive interventions and support networks. This could include initiatives such as culturally specific counselling services, peer support groups, and mental health education programmes tailored to community beliefs, values, and practices.
- Ensure that mental health services are integrated into existing community infrastructure and accessible through trusted community spaces such as faith-based institutions, community centres, and cultural organisations. This will help to reduce stigma and increase uptake of services within communities disproportionately facing financial challenges due to the cost-of-living crisis.

2. Investment in the VCSE Sector Must be Prioritised:

- Recognise the invaluable role of the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in providing trusted, credible, and specialised support to vulnerable community groups, including Punjabi communities. Allocate funding and resources to support the capacity-building and sustainability of VCSE organisations working in the mental health sector.
- Foster partnerships between statutory mental health services and VCSE organisations to enhance collaboration, knowledge sharing, and service provision. This could involve commissioning VCSE organisations to deliver culturally sensitive mental health interventions, providing training and resources to VCSE staff, and facilitating joint initiatives to address community needs.
- Promote the involvement of VCSE organisations in policy development, service planning, and decision-making processes related to mental health provision. Ensure that funding mechanisms are transparent, accessible, and responsive to the diverse needs of VCSE organisations, particularly those serving marginalised and underserved communities.



3. We Must Challenge the Root Causes of the Cost-of-Living Crisis:

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of the cost-of-living crisis, with a particular focus on austerity policies that have exacerbated inequalities and contributed to poor mental health outcomes, especially among individuals with pre-existing conditions.
- Advocate for policy reforms that address structural inequalities, promote economic justice, and prioritise the well-being of marginalised communities. This may include measures such as fair wages, affordable housing, access to quality healthcare, and social safety nets to mitigate the impact of financial hardship and poverty on mental health.
- Engage in dialogue and collaboration with affected communities, grassroots organisations, and advocacy groups to amplify the voices of those most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and ensure that policy responses are informed by their lived experiences and perspectives.
- Prioritise investments in social determinants of mental health, including education, employment, housing, and community infrastructure, to address underlying systemic factors contributing to mental health disparities and promote resilience and well-being across diverse communities.

Conclusion

The link between the rising cost of living and worsening mental health is clear and deeply concerning. Financial pressures have not only aggravated existing mental health issues but have also sparked new crises for many individuals and communities. To tackle these challenges, it is crucial to address the root causes: poverty, socio-economic inequalities, and the increasing cost of living. Investing in and supporting the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector is a powerful way to achieve this. The VCSE sector is vital in providing essential support and care, driving towards fairer and more equitable mental health outcomes, especially for marginalised and minoritised communities. By empowering this sector, we can build resilience, enhance mental well-being, and create a more just and supportive society for all



Navigating the Cost-of-Living Crisis with Mental Health & Money Advice (MHMA) **[26]**

Background: During the escalating cost-of-living crisis, individuals and households are grappling with unprecedented challenges, not only in managing their finances but also in coping with their mental health. Mental Health & Money Advice (MHMA) has launched a comprehensive cost-of-living hub, designed to empower individuals with information, signposting, tips, and advice.

Dealing with Money Problems: MHMA provides practical insights on managing household budgets during the crisis. Tips and advice can inspire individuals to make informed financial decisions, mitigating the immediate impact of the cost-of-living crisis on a person's daily life.

Mental Health Support: The hub offers a holistic perspective on how the cost-of-living crisis could affect mental health. Advice is available directly alongside resources, to help individuals build a proactive approach towards safeguarding their mental health.

Navigating Knock-On Effects: MHMA also advises on the potential knock-on effects of the cost-of-living crisis and offers resources and strategies to navigate challenges, to help individuals nurture their well-being and mental health.

MHMA have also produced a series of blogs individuals can access to seek information, advice and support on the cost-of-living crisis and mental health:

Energy Price Rise Blog: This focuses on managing mental health and finances amidst energy price rises, helping individuals build their resilience during this challenging period.

Welfare Benefits Section: A dedicated section to help individuals explore eligible welfare benefits, empowering them to make informed decisions about financial assistance.

Debt Management Options: Presenting individuals with all available options for dealing with debt, allowing them to devise a sustainable plan for financial recovery.

Toolkit for Healthcare Conversations: This toolkit aims to equip individuals to engage in meaningful conversations with their healthcare provider, ensuring mental health concerns are prioritised and addressed.

Spending Management Tips: Offers individuals practical tips and ideas on spending management, to inspire them to take control of finances, to establish a sense of financial stability.

Conclusion: By leveraging MHMA's cost-of-living hub and its variety of resources, individuals can protect themselves from immediate financial challenges and build mental resilience during challenging times.

Porchlight's Support for Mental Health and Cost-of-Living Challenges [27]

Introduction: Porchlight is an organisation which provides recovery support for individuals experiencing severe mental illness, operates in Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, Medway, Swale, and Thanet. Their comprehensive services extend to those facing social factors such as housing issues, financial difficulties, and social isolation, particularly during the current cost-of-living crisis.

Porchlight's Services: Recovery Support for Severe Mental Illness: Porchlight's core service offers up to six months of tailored recovery support for individuals aged 18 and above grappling with severe mental illness. The support encompasses a range of challenges, including mental health issues, housing instability, financial strain, and social isolation.

Assessment and Referral Process: Porchlight accepts referrals from health and social care professionals, as well as voluntary sector organisations. Through a thorough assessment process, Porchlight collaborates with professionals to understand the specific needs of individuals and determine the appropriateness of the support offered.

Preventing Crisis Escalation with Peer Support: Porchlight recognises the importance of proactive intervention and collaborates with the Mental Health Crisis Alternative Peer Service. This additional service, available in Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley, Medway, and Thanet, provides support lasting up to 12 weeks. It focuses on preventing mental health issues from escalating to a crisis point and employs recovery-focused techniques.

Conclusion: Porchlight seeks to address social factors that contribute to an individual's well-being and mental health. By offering recovery-focused support and proactive crisis prevention services, Porchlight plays a crucial role in enhancing the resilience and stability of individuals facing mental health challenges and offers support that is necessary during the cost-of-living crisis.

Jade Youth and Community Centre [28]

Background: The Jade Youth and Community Centre stands as a pillar of support in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. Established in response to the pressing needs of the local community, the centre is committed to addressing the complex challenges faced by youth and families in the area and has evolved into a vital hub in the community.

Key Services:

- 1. Mental Health Support:** At the forefront of the centre's mission is its comprehensive mental health support services. Recognising the critical need for accessible and immediate intervention, the centre provides counselling, therapy, and support groups for individuals grappling with mental health challenges. Trained counsellors and mental health professionals offer a safe and nurturing environment for individuals to explore their emotions, develop coping strategies, and forge pathways towards healing and resilience.
- 2. Educational Support:** Understanding the pivotal role of education in shaping the future of youth, the centre offers a range of educational support programs. From tutoring and homework assistance to career guidance and skill-building workshops, the centre is keen to empower youth with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive academically and professionally.
- 3. Community Engagement:** Through various outreach initiatives, events, and activities, the centre creates opportunities for individuals and families to connect, collaborate, and celebrate their shared heritage and experiences. From cultural festivals and community clean-up drives to intergenerational storytelling sessions, the centre serves as a vibrant hub where bonds are forged, and relationships are nurtured.

Impact: Through its integrated approach to support and empowerment, the centre has become a beacon of hope and resilience within the community, transforming lives and fostering positive change during a tough moment for children and families, due to the cost-of-living crisis.

- 1. Improved Mental Health:** The centre's mental health support services have had a transformative impact on individuals grappling with mental health challenges. By providing timely intervention, compassionate care, and tailored treatment plans, the centre has helped individuals regain their sense of agency, resilience, and hope.
- 2. Enhanced Educational Attainment:** Through its educational support programs, the centre has empowered young people to excel academically and pursue their dreams. By offering mentorship, resources, and guidance, the centre has equipped young people with the skills, confidence, and opportunities necessary to unlock their full potential.
- 3. Stronger Community Bonds:** Most importantly, the centre has played a pivotal role in strengthening community bonds and fostering a sense of belonging. Through its inclusive and welcoming environment, the centre has brought together individuals from diverse backgrounds, forging connections, and built bonds across generations.

Mental Health Independent Support Team, Bolton, UK [29]

Background: The Mental Health Independent Support Team (MHIST) is a service user led organisation based in Bolton, dedicated to providing vital support services to residents including children and young people, residents facing financial stress and mental health difficulties and well as carers and local mental health services in the area. Recognising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on mental wellbeing, MHIST has launched a Cost-of-Living Project, aimed at providing practical assistance and emotional support to those feeling overwhelmed by financial strain.

Key Features of the Cost-of-Living Project:

- 1. Free 1-Hour Sessions:** MHIST offers free, pre-bookable 1-hour sessions as part of the Cost-of-Living Project. These sessions are designed to provide individuals with a safe and confidential space to discuss their concerns, seek guidance, and receive practical advice on managing the financial pressures brought about by the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2. Flexible Appointment Times:** Recognising the diverse needs and schedules of its clients, MHIST offers flexible appointment times for the Cost-of-Living Project sessions. Sessions are available on Mondays from 1-5 PM, Tuesdays from 9 AM-1 PM, and Wednesdays from 1-5 PM, ensuring accessibility for individuals with varying commitments and responsibilities.
- 3. Easy Booking Process:** Booking a session with MHIST for the Cost-of-Living Project is simple and straightforward. Individuals can reach out to MHIST by phone at 01204 527 200 and request an appointment for the Cost-of-Living Project.

Impact and Benefits:

- 1. Immediate Support:** The launch of the Cost-of-Living Project provides individuals in Bolton with immediate access to support and assistance during challenging times. By offering free sessions, MHIST ensures that individuals experiencing financial strain do not have to navigate their concerns alone but have a dedicated team of professionals to lean on.
- 2. Practical Guidance:** Through the Cost-of-Living Project sessions, individuals receive practical guidance and advice on managing their finances and coping with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Whether it is budgeting tips, debt management strategies, or accessing financial resources, MHIST equips individuals with the tools they need to navigate their financial challenges effectively.
- 3. Emotional Support:** In addition to practical assistance, the Cost-of-Living Project sessions offer individuals a space to express their emotions, concerns, and fears surrounding the cost-of-living crisis. The compassionate and non-judgmental support provided by MHIST helps individuals feel heard, validated, and supported during financial hardship.

Conclusion: The launch of the Cost-of-Living Project by the Mental Health Independent Support Team (MHIST) in Bolton represents the organisation's commitment to prioritising the wellbeing of individuals in its local community and offering support that is urgently needed and relevant to the current needs of the local community.

Citizens Advice North and West Kent, Money, and Mental Health Project [30]

Background: Citizens Advice North and West Kent (CANWK) operates a vital service known as the Money and Mental Health project, aimed at supporting clients living with mental health issues who require help in managing debt and or financial challenges. Recognising the link between mental health and financial wellbeing, CANWK offers a holistic approach to support, addressing not only debt concerns but also providing guidance on benefits, housing, and employment issues where necessary.

Key Features of the Project:

Holistic Support: The Money and Mental Health project provides holistic support to clients, acknowledging that financial challenges often intersect with other aspects of life. Project workers are trained to identify additional areas where clients may require assistance, ensuring that comprehensive support is provided beyond just debt management.

Preventative Action: In addition to managing existing problems, the project focuses on preventative action to lessen future financial difficulties. By maximising clients' income and improving their financial capability, CANWK aims to break the cycle of debt and promote long-term financial stability.

Quality Assurance: Project workers are fully trained Citizens Advice advisers who follow strict quality standards set by Citizens Advice. Close supervision and oversight ensure that the advice provided meets these standards, and the service is also regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, guaranteeing the highest level of professionalism and integrity.

Proactive Involvement: Recognising that clients living with mental health issues may face barriers towards acting independently, project workers are empowered to be more proactively involved in clients' cases. This may include contacting and negotiating with third parties on behalf of clients, to reduce the burden on individuals struggling with mental health challenges.

Impact: Through the Money and Mental Health project, clients receive tailored support to manage debt and enhance financial stability. By addressing financial concerns with mental health issues, clients experience improved overall wellbeing and reduced stress related to financial difficulties. Also, Project workers empower clients to advocate for themselves while also advocating on their behalf when necessary. By taking proactive steps to negotiate with third parties and navigate complex financial systems, project workers help clients assert their rights and achieve favourable outcomes. Overall, the Money and Mental Health project offered by Citizens Advice North and West Kent serves as a lifeline for individuals living with mental health issues who are struggling with debt and financial challenges. Through its holistic approach, the project not only addresses immediate concerns but also promotes long-term financial stability and empowerment. As a result, clients experience improved wellbeing and a renewed sense of hope for the future.

The Money Minded Project, Nottingham [31]

Background: The Money Minded Project in Nottingham serves as a crucial link between individuals experiencing low-level mental health issues and those facing financial challenges such as money, benefit, or debt issues. This project aims to connect individuals with the appropriate support and resources to address their specific needs.

Key Features of the Project:

- 1. Tailored Support:** The Money Minded Project offers personalised support to individuals based on their unique circumstances. Link Workers work closely with clients to understand their financial challenges and mental health concerns, providing tailored guidance and assistance to help them navigate their difficulties effectively.
- 2. Referral Process:** Individuals seeking support from the Money Minded Project can reach out directly to discuss their circumstances with one of the Link Workers. Additionally, professionals who identify clients in need of support can refer them to the project by completing a referral form and emailing it to the designated address.
- 3. Wide Range of Services:** The project offers a comprehensive range of services to address various financial issues faced by individuals. This includes support with priority debts such as rent, council tax, and energy bills, as well as non-priority debts like loans and overdrafts. Additionally, the project can help with debt management plans, debt relief orders, and bankruptcy applications.
- 4. Welfare Benefit Advice:** In addition to debt-related support, the Money Minded Project offers welfare benefit advice to help individuals maximise their income and access the financial support they are entitled to. This includes assistance with benefit applications, challenging benefit decisions through mandatory reconsideration and appeals, and representation at benefit appeal hearings.

Impact: With the support and guidance provided by the Money Minded Project, individuals experience improved financial stability and relief from the burden of debt and financial worries. By addressing both mental health and financial issues, the project helps individuals regain control over their lives and move towards financial independence. Also, the project's holistic approach to support ensures that individuals' mental health concerns are addressed alongside their financial challenges.

Taraki's Cost of Living Initiative for Punjabi communities [32]

Background: In October 2022, amidst the growing cost-of-living crisis, the Chai in the City Open Group for Punjabi Men convened virtually to address the pressing issue. The group, known for its insightful discussions and supportive environment, welcomed participants to delve into the impact of the crisis on individuals and communities.

Key Services Delivered:

- 1. Facilitated Discussions:** The forum structured its conversation around three guiding questions: individual impacts, mutual support strategies, and institutional community assistance. Participants engaged openly, sharing practical insights and personal experiences regarding the day-to-day challenges posed by the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2. Sharing Practical Tips:** Participants offered valuable advice and strategies for coping with rising expenses, stressing the importance of collective support and resource sharing within Punjabi communities.
- 3. Cultural Strengths Utilisation:** Recognising cultural strengths such as communal cooking and collective resource-sharing, the group explored ways to extend support to all members, particularly those hesitant to seek help due to cultural stigmas surrounding financial struggles.
- 4. Promoting Wellbeing:** The forum acknowledged the interconnectedness between financial stability and overall wellbeing, providing a safe space for individuals to discuss their concerns and seek support without fear of judgment.
- 5. Future Forum Topics:** Participants were encouraged to suggest topics for future discussions, ensuring that the forum remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of Punjabi communities.

Impact:

- 1. Community Empowerment:** Through open dialogue and resource-sharing, participants felt empowered to navigate the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis more effectively, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual support within the community.
- 2. Reduced Stigma:** By addressing cultural perceptions surrounding financial difficulties and offering a supportive environment for discussing such issues, the forum helped to reduce stigma and promote a more open and understanding attitude towards financial struggles.
- 3. Practical Support:** Participants gained practical tips and strategies for managing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, alleviating some of the immediate stress and anxiety associated with financial insecurity.
- 4. Cultural Resilience:** Leveraging cultural strengths such as communal cooking and collective support networks, the forum highlighted the resilience of Punjabi communities in the face of economic challenges, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and mutual assistance.

Conclusion: Taraki's Cost of Living Initiative for Punjabi Communities exemplifies the power of community-led initiatives in addressing issues emerging from the cost-of-living crisis and promoting collective wellbeing. Through facilitated discussions, practical support, and the prioritisation of cultural strengths, the initiative has made strides in empowering Punjabi communities to navigate the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis.

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