



# The Value of Small in a Big Crisis

The distinctive contribution, value and experiences of smaller charities in England and Wales during the COVID 19 pandemic

Voluntary Action Camden AGM, 20 April 2021



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# Introduction



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# Building on the 'Value of Small'

The original **Value of Small** research (2018) identified **three core distinctive features** of smaller charities:

1. **Service offer:** who they serve and what they do.
2. **Approach:** how they work.
3. **Position:** the role they play in communities and their contribution to public services.



Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research



## *The value of small*

*In-depth research into the distinctive contribution, value and experiences of small and medium-sized charities in England and Wales*



Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership







# Testing the Value of Small Framework

We revisited our **four case study areas** to:

- Explore **how smaller charities responded** during the COVID 19 pandemic
- Understand **why this mattered** to vulnerable individuals and communities
- Generate a deeper understanding of the **distinctiveness and value** of smaller charities
- **Provide evidence** for how their work could be promoted, developed and supported

Figure 1: An overview of the case study areas and research undertaken



**The Distinctiveness of Smaller Charities  
During the COVID 19 Pandemic**



# A Distinctive Service Offer

Who **smaller charities supported** set them apart as distinct from other types of providers...



People disproportionately affected by COVID 19 due to characteristics such as ethnicity, poverty and ill-health.



People who struggled to access or understand public health guidance due to language, literacy and digital exclusion.



People for whom face-to-face or in person services were still needed due to isolation and lack of support networks.

Focus on **addressing need** and providing **human contact** in areas where **public services were less visible or active**



# A Distinctive Approach

By **showing up** at the start, and **sticking around** for the duration, smaller charities were frequently **contrasted** with...



## The Public Sector

Slow to react early on

Less personal

More remote

## Mutual Aid

'On the ground' similarly early

Dissipated over time

Less co-ordinated



a **consistent and trusted presence** for vulnerable communities throughout the pandemic





# A Distinctive Position

Smaller charities were recognised for their unique ability to **reach certain communities** and get **support to them fast**



Disadvantaged neighbourhoods



Communities of faith or ethnicity



People seeking asylum



People experiencing poor mental health

Smaller charities were seen as **trusted conduits** for information and communication about the pandemic

But, **uncertainty about the lasting impact** on relationships with the public sector, particularly among **Black, Asian and minority ethnic -led charities**

# **The Value of Smaller Charities During the COVID 19 Pandemic**



# Value to Individuals and Communities

Smaller charities' work to **promote and preserve positive wellbeing** has been to the fore...



Keeping people physically safe and well fed through providing food and access to medicines.



Mitigating the impact on mental health brought about by lockdown, shielding and social distancing.



Providing information to people confused by government communications or by rumours circulating in their community.

Ensuring people and communities emerge from pandemic in a better position than may otherwise might be...with **less need for acute public services**



# Value to the Economy

Although **economic downturn** and **funding pressures** are likely to reduce smaller charities' economic footprint, this has been **maximised** through...



Continuing to employ local people, limited use of furlough or redundancy



Accessing pots of funding to support crisis response that could not have been brought in by other providers

However, grants often small-scale and short-term and **unlikely to offset loss of income** from rental or trading



# Value to Public Services

Most smaller charities focussed their work on supporting people and communities **most likely to be adversely affected** by COVID 19



Reducing the risk of people in extremely clinically vulnerable groups contracting the virus



Efforts incurred very little additional cost to the public sector



Minimising demand on the health system when acute care was stretched to the limit

This is in addition to **longer-term upstream benefits** from mitigating the wider effects of lockdown



# Added Value

Three main ways that smaller charities have been able to **add value to what was happening locally** during the pandemic



Using their networks and partnerships to maximise the effectiveness of the initial crisis response



Reassigning staff and volunteers to new roles to meet new needs as they emerged



Communicating government messages to communities where these were not getting through

However, many smaller charities – Black, Asian and minority ethnic -led organisations in particular - feel that **this value remains poorly understood**

# Policy Recommendations



# A Call for National and Local Action

How to foster **local ecosystems of providers** capable of **absorbing, adapting** and contributing to **transformational change**?

**#1**

Fostering a thriving and resilient population of smaller charities

**#2**

Long-term, flexible, core funding for smaller charities

**#3**

Investing in social and community infrastructure

**#4**

Putting social value and wellbeing at the heart of public commissioning and procurement

**#5**

Enhancing digital inclusion and service delivery





# The Value of Small in a Big Crisis

**Chris Dayson, Leila Baker and James Rees**

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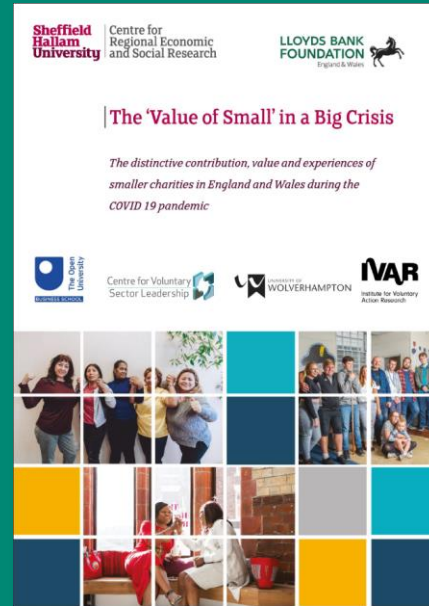
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