

What needs to change to build a Fairer Scotland?

Much has been made of the way the coronavirus pandemic has magnified inequality in Scotland. For many people, vital services and community spaces provided essential routes to support, enhancing wellbeing, opportunities for social connections and above all a chance for people to access and realise their human rights. As these important pillars of support shifted online or closed completely as lockdown restrictions were enforced, Corra began to observe the impact this was having on people and communities. Including a surge in demand for food distribution and fractions of the population excluded from the increasingly digital world. Corra's recent response to the Equality and Human Rights Committee Inquiry¹ highlights some of these challenges and the groups of people disproportionately affected.

Corra also learnt of the extraordinary efforts from communities and third sector organisations. The pandemic appeared to bring about a shift in gear, and became the catalyst for new collaborations, approaches and mindsets that challenged the conventional structures many groups worked within prior to coronavirus. The immediate response to the crisis saw an increase in community leadership. In many instances these responses were built on new collaborations and trusting local people and organisations to develop solutions to issues arising in their community. The coronavirus pandemic has presented an important opportunity to deliver real systemic change and build on the recent shifts in practice.

This paper draws on insights from across Corra Foundation's work alongside people, charities and communities, and sets out ideas for supporting meaningful change to build forward better.

Key learning from across Corra Foundation:

Mental Health: Combating isolation and improving mental health has long been a prominent theme for funded organisations and the communities Corra works alongside. Groups supported through the Partnership Drugs Initiative have reported concerns over the impact of families experiencing poor mental health and living in poverty. 62% of the applications received through #ShiftThePower Comic Relief fund (launched during the pandemic) have been for organisations helping to address mental health issues.

Food and fuel: A notable increase in demand for everyday essentials has been observed across Corra's place-based work and grant making. Fifteen organisations were offered emergency Partnership Drugs Initiative grants², all of these grants were used to support

¹ https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/Corra-final_response-Impact-of-COVID-19-pandemic-on-Equalities-and-Human-Rights.pdf

² <https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/PDI-COVID-2020.pdf>

families with their basic needs including fuel vouchers, phone top-ups and food packages. All nine communities supported through People in Place supported local food distribution. Corra in partnership with others administered The Wellbeing Fund, The Food fund and the Supporting Communities Fund, and a significant majority of these grants supported food and fuel initiatives.

The shift to digital: Many third sector organisations and community groups have worked hard to shift their services online; keeping people connected and supported throughout the coronavirus pandemic. In just nine specific neighbourhoods Corra' works alongside, over 13,000 Facebook connections were made between March and September 2020. However, Corra has also learnt of the challenges of digital exclusion felt by different groups of people, including families with little or no access to devices to support children and young people with home-schooling, older people feeling 'left behind' as technology advances and for those experiencing language barriers, understanding and accessing available support has become increasingly difficult. Insights from people and communities demonstrated that experiences of digital exclusion during lockdown compounded feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Idea one: Share power and amplify the most marginalised voices to understand what change is needed.

The coronavirus pandemic ground many aspects of society to a halt, and in doing so exposing and exacerbating inequality and discrimination in Scotland. The most disproportionate impacts of coronavirus were felt by those of whom 'the old normal' did not work for, so without including their voices in discussions about the future, the 'new normal' will not work for them either. However, the crisis has also brought about new ways of working along with renewed calls for change. There is important opportunity to rethink systems and power to create a fairer Scotland.

Ideas for building forward better, shifting and sharing power:

- **Human rights must underpin the recovery response.** Human rights-based approaches in policy and practice have been gaining traction in recent years. The importance of human rights has been heightened by the coronavirus crisis which has accelerated the impacts of poverty. Corra welcomes the increased emphasis on human rights-based approaches, this is reflected in the Scottish Government's recent Programme for Government and the rhetoric used from the Social Renewal Advisory Board. To achieve these ambitions, conversations on Scotland's future must involve the voices of those of whom the health, social and economic impacts of coronavirus have been felt most acutely. Corra continues to amplify people's voices and showcase examples of people-led change. These [Community Stories](#) capture the stories of people and groups coming together, sharing experiences and what they believe is needed to build forward better.

- **Harness the power of place-based approaches** to equip people with the resources and opportunities to challenge inequality, promote human rights and drive the change that matters to them. The response to the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the extent place-based approaches can support people to realise their human rights. Communities have taken the lead in delivering activities that fit their local context and challenges. For instance, in Carbrain the community council, led³ entirely by local people, developed an initiative that distributed local food to hundreds of families with the help of volunteers. As part of the wider Social Action Inquiry⁴, Corra and partners are learning from community led responses⁵ to coronavirus. The research will explore the role of people led social action and how this can be sustained to build a fairer Scotland.
- **Enhance the role of children and young people as valued, active contributors to communities and society.** The impact of coronavirus is likely to have a long-term effect on the lives and wellbeing of children and young people. This includes concerns over the attainment gap, employment prospects and mental health. Corra has learnt of the ways the response to the pandemic lacked opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard on the decisions that affect them. For instance, returning to school and further education. The Listening Fund's strength in Solidarity report⁶ sets out important recommendations from young people on how to embed their voices and insights into practice. Across Scotland there has been a call for the ongoing investment in youth work services and seeking evidence of lived experience in funding applications.
- **Work alongside Black, Asian and minority communities.** The pandemic has not only exposed inequalities facing Black, Asian and minority ethnic people it has heightened them. Only eight per cent of applications Corra received to the Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund and one per cent of applications to the Third Sector Resilience Fund were from groups working with Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities. Highlighting that the crisis funding response did not fully reach into these communities. Corra has been working alongside others to increase its networks and understanding to develop a community grant making programme that will be

³ <https://www.corra.scot/blogs/case-studies/carbrain-and-hillcrest-community-council/>

⁴ The Social Action Inquiry is being set up by a partnership of organisations: Carnegie UK Trust; Corra Foundation; the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE); Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO); The National Lottery Community Fund; Foundation Scotland; and The Robertson Trust. The aim of the Inquiry is to find out more about how communities can take action that makes a difference. It will look at what helps, and what gets in the way. It's hoped that it will help influence how Scotland rebuilds after the coronavirus pandemic.

⁵ <https://www.togetherwehelp.scot/>

⁶ <https://www.thelisteningfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/recommendations-for-funders-from-strength-in-solidarity-report.pdf>

designed and delivered by Black, Asian and minority ethnic people. This approach is important to ensure that there is genuine reach into communities that is mindful of culture, language and challenges that are unique to Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, as well as building on and strengthening the power that communities hold.

- **Decision makers must work to share their power and give people with lived experience a seat around their table.** Supporting those with lived experience to have their voices heard is an important part of Corra’s approach to grant making and place-based working. This includes lived experience panels engaging in the deliberation and decision-making process of the Comic Relief #ShiftThePower⁷ Fund and The Challenge Fund⁸. Similarly, young people were involved in the design The Listening Fund⁹ which aims to create a culture of listening to inform approaches and service delivery in third sector organisations.

“If we continue to design systems and make policy decisions that do not take into account the voices of people who are directly impacted by those decisions, we will always be missing an important part of the puzzle.” Insights from evaluation of Corra administered Challenge Fund Decision-Making Panel

Idea two: Seize opportunities to learn from and scale up the Participatory Scotland model to support increased community engagement and access to space.

Place-based approaches support communities to connect, collaborate and take action that leads to positive change. Through the People in Place programme, Corra has supported increased opportunities for communities to have their voices heard. For instance, in Fernhill, a participatory budgeting process supported people to be part of the design and decision-making process that led to ten local projects being funded.

As thinking shifts from the immediate coronavirus response to how Scotland can build forward better, it will be important to build on the groundwork of initiatives already underway such as, the Local Governance Review¹⁰ and Public Sector Reform, and work to reignite the momentum to support and empower communities through place-based working.

However, a prerequisite of sustained engagement is access to agenda free community spaces. The availability of free, accessible space allows communities to build agency and is fundamental to enable people to host activities, build connections and act on the issues that matter to them. A lack of access to affordable and agenda free spaces is one of the key issues for the communities Corra works alongside. Communities often have innovative ideas

⁷ <https://www.corra.scot/comic-relief-fund/supporting-communities-to-shiftthepower/>

⁸ <https://www.corra.scot/blogs/opening-the-door-to-lived-experience/>

⁹ <https://scotland.thelisteningfund.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/Final-Local-governance-review-Corra-Foundation-response-1.pdf>

for the challenges they face, but without access to space these ideas may never come into fruition. Corra is committed to working with local people to have spaces that enable them to meet, connect and engage in ways that are meaningful to them.

Corra Foundation has been developing Participatory Scotland based on, and in partnership with Participatory City Foundation (www.weareeveryone.org). This model focusses on setting up an enabling and agenda- free infrastructure of ‘neighbourhood shops’, and ‘Warehouse’ workshops where local people are supported by design staff to imagine, develop and test ideas for their local community. These range from community kitchens, gardening installed spaces, community bee-keeping and shared child-care, to informal tea and toast drop in mornings for social interaction.

The model revolves around lots of different activities happening at any one time, and so does not rely on one individual or small group of volunteers to keep going. Instead, the many and varied activities mean that individuals and communities can access what they want when and where it suits their lifestyle. All activities are free to access and having easily accessible ‘neighbourhood shops’ in communities removes barriers to participation. In many instances the knock-on effect of being able to test ideas locally means the development of local community businesses supported through the Warehouse workshop, and pop-up shop fronts.

Ideas to build forward better and support access to community spaces:

- **Test out and learn from new approaches to accessing agenda free spaces.** For instance, the Participatory Scotland model and the development of ‘meanwhile spaces’. Emerging evidence from the Every One Every Day project in Barking & Dagenham highlights the strengths of this approach and makes a strong case for Universal Basic Infrastructure¹¹ that equips individuals and communities with “*the tools to act, participating on their own terms, with their available time...and with their individual skills and energies*”.
- **Support the reimagining of neighbourhoods, towns and city centres** being led by the Town Centre Review Group, the development of 20-minute neighbourhoods and the Place-based Investment Programme¹². This also includes community involvement in infrastructure and planning to support ambitions of a Wellbeing Economy and the vision of the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland’s¹³ 30-year strategic horizon.
- **Weave a culture of participation into the fabric of how we build forward better.** For instance, scale up the Participatory Budgeting processes to support communities to engage in decision making processes. In addition, supporting community led grant making processes that put people at the centre of designing grant criteria,

¹¹ <https://medium.com/@TessyBritton/universal-basic-everything-f149afc4cef1>

¹² <https://www.corra.scot/news/corra-foundations-response-to-the-town-centre-expert-review-group/>

¹³ <https://infrastructurecommission.scot/>



process and decision making. Corra is delivering community grant making through its #ShiftThePower Comic Relief funding and is working with partners to develop a Black, Asian and minority ethnic fund that uses community led grant making approaches.

Idea three: Offer trust and time through flexible, long term funding arrangements

The third sector represent a diverse range of organisations working hard to amplify the voices of those furthest from power, protect human rights and put the needs of communities and the environment front and centre of their approaches. Third sector organisations have demonstrated their agility and resounding commitment to those in need throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Corra observed the pace at which organisations worked to shift their services online or develop initiatives that directly respond to the impact of coronavirus on communities.

As well as being quick to respond to the immediate crisis facing families and communities, it is likely that the third sector will be first to respond to the emerging needs and longer term impacts of the pandemic, such as mental health, employment support, financial advice and youth work services that could see a substantial increase in demand. Many of these organisations will also be the first to see the increasing pressures faced by families and communities who were already in poverty but have been further compounded by coronavirus. 80% of the £2,000 Scottish Government's Proactive Wellbeing grants made were for meeting the immediate practical needs of vulnerable individuals and families. The third sector must be supported as it continues to adapt to the changing circumstances.

As it became clear coronavirus was going to have a significant impact on the lives and work of many, independent funders reassured organisations by offering flexible grants, streamlined processes and easing the burden of reporting requirements. This was combined with the Scottish Government's £350 million emergency funding package that was administered through various funding streams. Applications were reviewed and funding distributed at considerable pace to reach the groups most at need.

This funding response was welcome and necessary to support the third sector with the immediate needs of the pandemic. However, longer term solutions are needed to ensure the sector is well resourced and sustained.

The financial fragility of the third sector is of great concern and one that has become more acute (12% of 583 organisations reporting to Corra that received funding through the Scottish Government's Third Sector Resilience Fund said they were unsure if their organisation would be operating in the next six months). Corra has learnt of many organisations relying on their unrestricted reserves to stay afloat. Whereas others simply did not have the reserves to use when their other sources of income, such as fundraising, depleted.

Sustainable funding solutions means recognising the valuable contribution the third sector makes to the economy, as well as its capabilities to drive forward human rights-based approaches and support those at risk of poverty.

Corra is part of a UK-wide learning review hosted by Institute for Voluntary Action Research and involves UK-wide independent funders and third sector organisations. The group are reviewing what steps and measures implemented during coronavirus could change the shape of grant-making to more inclusive and accessible. In early 2021 a call to action will be launched highlighting what all funders could do. The learning from this should be recognised not only within the independent funding community but also public funding structures.

Ideas to build forward better and rethink funding for the third sector and communities:

- **Offer trust and time:** responding to the crisis has meant a more streamlined approach to grant-giving, easier processes and less bureaucracy. It has relied on trusting relationships between funders and applicants. Independent funders and Scottish Government must consider how to build on these measures to fund to better serve the needs of the sector and seek to offer the flexibility and trust that was afforded in the crisis response.
- **Acknowledge that restricted, short term funding arrangements hinder the third sector's capacity and capability to deliver vital services.** This is particularly relevant to organisations who had to adapt quickly to coronavirus both in complying with new legislation and delivering services. Unrestricted and longer-term funding enables more scope to plan and deliver services that are the pace and needs of the people and communities the third sector are there to serve.
- **Invest in connections:** One of the key recommendations from Corra's 2020 [Connections Are Key research](#) was the need for funders and commissioners to recognise that relationship-based practice takes time but can have a lasting impact on families. Funders need to consider the ways secure funding can allow relationships and positive outcomes to flourish. This was also reiterated in the [Listening Fund's recent report](#) that set out recommendations for embedding listening practices into an organisation's culture:
"Take the pressure off service organisations by investing proactively in them, and recognise that they are likely to be able to do their jobs better if they do not have to worry about their own future while supporting young people's."
- **Support and trust in communities and grassroots initiatives.** The availability of funding to communities through the Supporting Communities Fund helped to galvanise local leadership. The efficiency at which funding was allocated to communities overpowered the barriers of risk aversion and bureaucratic processes that have hindered outcomes in the past. It will be important to understand the conditions that communities operate in and learn from what enables local leadership.

- **Investing in local:** Corra has seen the diversity of the third sector and private sector reach out and support communities. Social Enterprises have adapted and delivered services to meet the needs of their local areas. Local community cafes delivering food services and local shops offering online support packages. These small social enterprises and businesses are vital part of the make up of communities. As we look to build forward better, procurement practices need to ensure the principles of local supply chains are fully invested in. Prior to coronavirus Carnegie UK published a report on Kindness including the role of procurement¹⁴.

¹⁴ <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/blog/contracting-for-kindness-where-do-values-fit-into-procurement-and-commissioning-practices/>