

# Understanding Covid-19 at BBC Children in Need: The early pandemic period

As the pandemic took hold in March 2020, BBC Children in Need (BBC CiN) needed to understand the implications for children and young people and the projects we fund to support them (our grantees). This briefing summarises the key messages we found out in the April to May 2020 period. We will be updating our insight as the pandemic continues.



# How children and young people are being impacted by Covid-19

BBC Children in Need funds projects that target children and young people aged 0-18 years who face challenges in their lives. In April and May 2020, our grantees told us how the Covid-19 pandemic was having a detrimental effect on children and young people's lives in many ways - heightening existing challenges and making them more complex for some. It was also causing new challenges and risks for children and young people to deal with.

**In time to come, when our country is through the worst of this crisis, we need to be mindful of the legacy that it will have created... let us not forget about those whose lives will take much longer to get back on track. We will have families who have suffered the most harrowing of poor mental health experiences, we will have families who will have lost their incomes, we may even have families suffering bereavement because of Covid-19.**

BBC Children in Need grantee

**Many of our children have taken years to be able to confidently leave the house, be in social situations and access opportunities that all children should have, and many of our parents are now terrified that now having to stay indoors and experience 'enforced isolation' will take them back and that they'll struggle to re-integrate or come back in to the community once it is over.**

BBC Children in Need grantee

## Our approach

We sent a Covid-19 form to all BBC CiN grantees (3000+) to hear about the implications of Covid-19 and how projects were responding, in their own words. Nearly half our grantees submitted these forms during April and May 2020.

We analysed a sample of more than 300 of these forms and drew on conversations with grantees and networks, and insight from a range of external reports and research.

We needed to quickly learn about the fast-moving crisis from our grantees perspectives. We're aware this briefing is primarily adult perspectives of children's experiences. Children and young people have been involved in our Covid-19 journey through networks that inform our work. Children and young people's voices will be heard and reflected as we gather insight and evaluate our response to the pandemic.

*Throughout this report, we use the term grantee to reflect the projects that are funded by BBC Children in Need (BBC CiN). These projects are run by a range of different organisations.*

*The average value of grants in our portfolio is £63,400. The majority of the organisations that we fund are micro (income of less than £10,000) to medium sized (i.e. income up to £1M turnover per year).*



## 8 impact themes for children and young people during early Covid-19

Looking across a wide range of different groups of children and young people that our grantees' projects reach, we identified eight themes that show how Covid-19 was affecting children and young people who face challenges in their lives.

1. **Isolation:** children and families were missing personal connections, relationships and support from trusted adults and peers outside the home.
2. **Increased emotional wellbeing and mental health challenges:** the pandemic was impacting on existing mental health and new issues were emerging for children and their parents. Anxiety, fear and stress are particular concerns.
3. **Pressure on family relationships:** families were under pressure, from difficulties coping with stress and worry to crisis. Conflict and difficult relationships were increasing, whilst respite for children and parents was reducing.
4. **Increased exposure to harm:** children faced increased risks both within families and outside the home, e.g. with increased time online and being unable to access safe spaces.
5. **Basic needs are harder to meet:** children and families faced hunger and increased financial hardship. Digital access has become a basic need in lockdown.
6. **Reduced access to education & activities:** children lacked the stimulation, development opportunities, structure & positive engagement these can bring.
7. **Risks to physical wellbeing:** children's physical wellbeing was at risk through reduced nutrition or physical activity for fitness, for those with health conditions, from the pandemic itself.
8. **Concern for the future:** children, young people and families were concerned for the future, such as education transitions, loss of jobs or risks to job prospects and financial stability.

These themes were being experienced by many different groups of children who already face challenges in their lives. They span all ages from babies and toddlers right through to older teenagers.

Grantees were also concerned about children and young people's longer term outcomes, in particular mental health and wellbeing and re-integrating into 'normal' life after restrictions lift.



## Our grantees told us in their own words what they were seeing with the children and young people they work with

### Young carers:

"In light of Covid-19 and the social isolation that is enforced on all, the support networks for these young people now either don't exist or are trying to be delivered remotely. It is impossible to know the impact this will have on young people who are already stressed and suffering.

That there will be an impact on their mental and physical wellbeing is obvious and extremely worrying."

### Refugees and asylum seeking children:

"The already isolated and vulnerable young people we support are missing out on vital health messages: young people who believed they had to stay inside their houses even when there was no food; struggling to make use of 111; living with acute mental health problems, unable to attend their appointments or buy food that helps them take their medication properly.

Most are simply lonely, like many of us, but are experiencing this crisis alone or in places they didn't choose, worried for loved ones overseas, uncertain for the future, and trying their hardest to support others."

### Bereaved children:

"Children now being referred into our service will have a particularly difficult experience of bereavement - unable to visit loved ones in hospital or care homes and perhaps unable to attend the funeral. Socially distanced grief will be enormously distressing.

Once referred it will not be possible for the children to meet face to face with [our counsellor] and build trust and rapport in the usual way, so we need to find new ways to build that trusting, honest relationship."

### Disabled children:

"Many of our children have taken years to be able to confidently leave the house, be in social situations and access opportunities that all children should have, and many of our parents are now terrified that now having to stay indoors and experience 'enforced isolation' will take them back and that they'll struggle to re-integrate or come back in to the community once it is over."

### Mental health & wellbeing:

"The Covid-19 virus outbreak has had a devastating effect on the lives of children & young people experiencing mental-health problems & psychological distress.

The worry & anxiety about: becoming infected (or one of their family members becoming infected), living in isolation, not being able to go to school, family financial difficulties & unsafe home lives have brought a whole new raft of problems which have hugely increased the psychological distress & compounded the mental health problems of not only our existing clients, but additional children & young people across the... region."

### Domestic abuse:

"Covid-19 has presented many challenges. Child protection is a major concern. Perpetrators of domestic violence are motivated to cause harm; therefore the lock down situation is giving opportunity to further control & isolate families.

Children have witnessed increased domestic violent incidents, suffered physical abuse, suffered harsh punishments, suffered increased emotional abuse; they have voiced having increased worry due to parental ill-health & anxiety. Children have also voiced 'feeling low' & 'left out'."

# Our grantees: Early implications and responses to Covid-19

**It's a scary and uncertain time, we know that the need for our services will increase post pandemic and the needs of the young people who are in unsafe and unhappy homes need support now.**

BBC Children in Need Grantee

We found that many organisations faced significant change and uncertainty at a time when many felt children and young people needed them the most. Many faced a range of challenges due to the pandemic, potential financial difficulties, rising or changing demand and disrupted service delivery within government restrictions.

Despite this, many grantees were adapting their projects in creative ways, based on empathy, care and understanding for the specific needs of the children, young people and families they support.

**Many organisations are facing extremely difficult situations as our services are still needed - we still need to keep caring for children and families - but our usual activities and income generation has ground to a halt.**

BBC Children in Need Grantee

There was a shift to remote forms of support, and an emphasis on finding ways to keep in contact, maintain trusted relationships and meet new needs arising. There was also an increase in supporting children within the context of their families and homes. Whilst many quickly mobilised to move their support online, grantees' confidence and knowledge of working safely online varied.

**We need to be here for the children, so that they know we are here always, no matter what, and to let them know that we really do care.**

BBC Children in Need Grantee

Digital exclusion became a key issue for many children and young people, including younger ages and particular groups such as asylum seekers and refugees, those experiencing domestic abuse, those living in transient housing or living in poverty. Learning was already beginning to emerge around the varied receptiveness to and effectiveness of online approaches and we'll continue to explore this.



## What did early responses look like?

Grantees were responding to the situation in a variety of ways, such as suspending, increasing or reducing services. Many were adapting their delivery approach.

- **Online methods**, keeping in touch, delivering one to one & group support sessions, enabling peer support and clubs, posting and sharing ideas for activities and information, signposting & information sharing.
- **Resources for activities at home**, design and delivery of appropriate resources to enable positive activities at home for play, creativity, education, personal development and physical development.
- **Telephone**, keeping in touch, individual support, signposting & information sharing.
- **Provision of basic essentials**, meeting basic needs through delivering food parcels, linking families to food banks

Whilst most traditional face to face support stopped, there were some exceptions, such as respite for families in crisis, doorstep visits to show a child someone cares and checking on welfare, play-based support for children living in highly challenging situations and emotional support for highly vulnerable children or parents.

**We are finding that we are having to support whole families at the moment and escalate more families to specialist services due to the crisis and the isolation that families are facing.**

BBC Children in Need Grantee

## Grantees views on what we could do to help

In the early months of the pandemic, grantees suggestions for how BBC Children in Need could further support them centred around:

- Continued flexibility and re-assurance
- Support with core costs through grant flexibility or additional funding
- Additional funding for resources and other costs to address emerging and rising needs
- Providing guidance and facilitating connection to share advice and good practice

**We feel passionately about supporting our children fully through this time, which is and has been very traumatic for them.**

BBC Children in Need Grantee

## Using and learning from our insight

Our early insight fed into the design of a range of new grant programmes and more flexible approaches to funding by our grant-making team. Our key themes are feeding into a range of work across BBC Children in Need in our grant-making processes, fundraising and marketing and evaluating the impact of our Covid-19 response.

This briefing will be updated as the situation arising from Covid-19 continues. We continue to gather insight to understand the evolving needs of children and young people and the work being funded to address these issues.

Further information: Contact Charlotte Fielder at [charlotte.fielder@bbc.co.uk](mailto:charlotte.fielder@bbc.co.uk) or the Insight Team on [cin.insight@bbc.co.uk](mailto:cin.insight@bbc.co.uk)