Impact of the pandemic on the voluntary sector
The view from the Co-production Network for Wales
Collated by: Noreen Blanluet, noreen@copronet.wales

1. Shift in relationship between statutory sector and third sector
- There has been increased recognition from public bodies (and local authorities especially) of the value and the role that the third sector plays.
- The third sector and community organisations are more flexible to respond to need; they apply no or low eligibility criteria based on trust and community relationships ("if you say you need help, we believe you"), and as a result provide often small scale, but creative and immediate support.
- Public bodies and local authorities have been recognising this strength, putting more trust in the third sector, and sharing information more readily.
- We need to be able to hold on to this ability to be more open with sharing information, and being able to ask and offer help (reciprocal relationship between third and statutory sector).
- Organisations must play an enabling role (and be supported to do so, it's a new thing for many). They should play to their strengths, provide help and coaching to the third sector where useful, but also "get out of the way" and let the third sector and community groups do what they do best. Organisations must not take over or institutionalise (and crush) things that seem to work well in the community.

2. Resourcing the third sector in the short and long term
- The third sector was already stretched and dealing with increasing referrals from local authorities due to austerity (this was already a concern pre-lockdown).
- To maintain the shift in power and increased collaborative relationships between statutory and third sectors, funding and also reporting will need to be re-examined.
- To continue operating and doing what it does best, the third sector will need longer-term resourcing and support (as well as the immediate Covid relief funds that are currently being made available.)
- We hear a lot that people have little time to think, they're having to react all the time (and this will not ease as we are going into the second wave and the pressures of winter).
- If we want to learn in real time, identify what works and keep it, change what's not working, we need to be able to take stock and reflect. Our infrastructure needs to support time to think and consider long term improvements to our ways of working, as well as taking care of the immediate frontline delivery.

3. Learning curve (and creative curve)
- The third sector (as well as everyone else delivering services) has been learning very fast how to shift any normally face-to-face delivery, to working remotely: using a blend of online/digital interventions and other modalities (e.g. phone check-ins, doorstep activities, letters and activity packs).

- Digital inclusion and exclusion have offered opportunities as well as challenges. Organisations are rapidly learning and adapting, and trying to make sure people aren't forgotten, in the midst of the various forms of lockdown inequalities. (This is easier for hyperlocal organisations and groups to do.)
- There is no one size fits all and community groups and local third sector organisations are better placed to create local solutions to national challenges. Being able to share learning and examples of good practice would be of wide benefit. (As per previous comment - we need time to learn and reflect together, or we will be creating more narrow silos of operation.)

4. Looking through a co-production and citizen involvement lens

- Co-production happened during lockdown where it was already happening, with organisations (statutory and third sector both) listening to people, enabling everyone to build on their strengths, finding creative solutions, and collaborating effectively across silos.
- The third sector could co-produce better overall, just like the statutory sector could. There is a tendency to jump to providing solutions (especially if the organisation deliver a service), and not taking as much time to listen and build on people's strengths towards desired outcomes. It is a fine line to tread during an emergency crisis response and the understanding of co-production (when and when not to apply it) isn't fully embedded across organisations.
- During lockdown wasn't the time to learn the mindset and behaviours of co-production and citizen involvement (as organisations had enough on their plate to deal with) - but as this approach would enable them to make better use of resources and develop community (and organisational) resilience, it keeps becoming increasingly important.
- This also relates back to the comment above about bringing long term improvements to our ways of working, as well as taking care of the immediate emergency delivery.