

# Organisational Resilience

in Third Sector Youth Organisations in Bristol



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Jonny Brooks and Ifigenia MOUNTZI were involved in the early stages of the research.



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# Foreword

In 2017 the Children's Strategic Commissioning team recommissioned Bristol City Council's youth services with a budget cut of just over £1m. At this time, the City Office were developing the One City approach and suggested I contact the University of Bristol to explore how the Council and the University could work together to see what academic research could add to our commissioning.

I was put in touch with John McWilliams at the Professional Liaison Network (PLN) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University. Rather than simply employ an intern in my team, John and I co-designed an innovative partnership to carry out a piece of in-depth research. This research would be an ongoing study over three years, employing groups of undergraduate student research interns to conduct quantitative and qualitative research through the PLN's Q-Step Internship Scheme. The project has an academic lead from the University overseeing the work of the interns and the research proposal was approved through the University's School for Policy Studies' Research Ethics Committee.

The theme of the study is 'Resilience' with the aim of developing two strands of objective and independent research into our commissioned youth services: firstly, the factors that build resilience in young people and how the interventions delivered through our Targeted Youth Services support and deliver those factors. Secondly, identifying the factors that build resilience in organisations, testing the effectiveness of the new commissioning model used in the Youth Sector Support Fund contract, and whether it contributes to resilience in grassroots organisations to enable them to operate at a time of reduced public sector funding.

Once the contracts were awarded, the service providers – Creative Youth Network (CYN) and Quartet Community Foundation – were brought into the research partnership. Their engagement and participation in the project has been and continues to be crucial.

The research project has been up and running for approximately two years and to date we have employed 16 interns who have produced two initial reports, of which this is one. During this time the PLN, with my support, has successfully bid for further funding for both this piece of work and for other projects using this research model. Our project has just employed a further five interns to continue the research, and we look forward to sharing further findings in due course.

This report outlines factors that have been identified that contribute to resilience in third sector organisations which have then been corroborated through quantitative and qualitative research with voluntary and community sector organisations in the youth sector in Bristol. We hope it will be informative for commissioners and funders in future investment as well as to organisations.

My thanks go to all those who have helped support the research, including the many employees of youth sector organisations that have offered their time as research participants for this study.

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# The Project Steering group comprises:



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# Executive Summary

## Resilience

This report explores the resilience of youth sector organisations in Bristol. Our intention is to provide a robust framework of resilience for local VCSE (voluntary, community, social enterprise) sector organisations providing youth services. It is the first report in an on-going, longitudinal study.

Our initial findings cover five broad themes: organisational structure, funding, organisational networks, community engagement and monitoring and evaluation. We find that it is the relationships between these five themes that ultimately promote resilience, and not any single factor in isolation.

Understanding these themes gives us insight into the barriers to organisational resilience and how they can be addressed.

It is beyond the scope of this project to measure the efficacy of youth services themselves or to make specific recommendations to funders or organisations. However, we hope that these findings will contribute to an understanding of what factors might promote resilience in the local youth sector.

## Bristol's VCSE Sector

Bristol's VCSE sector, and the youth sector in particular, was already facing pressures prior to the onset of COVID-19. In January 2020, the YMCA released analysis which showed that in the South West, funding for youth services has been cut by 66% since 2010–11 (YMCA, 2020:8). The COVID-19 crisis has intensified the issues: fundraising income has dropped and 81% of Bristol's VCSE organisations report a rise in demand for their services (Black South West Network 2020).

With growing demands on services, youth sector organisations must be able to sustain themselves and adapt to ensure that young people's needs are met and that services have a lasting impact.

## Findings

A Concept Map of organisational resilience is presented on page 13.

### 1. Organisational structure

While no single organisational structure promotes resilience and it is unrelated to organisational size, the study has found that the coherence between an organisation's mission, model and strategy forms the foundation of resilience. Specificity of mission, appropriateness of model, and consistency of strategy are all needed.

This appeared to be important when organisations were forced to adapt their models and strategies during the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. Organisations with a consistent structure were able to respond more effectively during the first COVID-19 lockdown and continued to serve their community of young people.

### 2. Funding diversity and reliable core costs

Funding diversity came out as the most important funding issue for organisational resilience, showing that a mix of grant funding, traded income, contracts and others is likely to make an organisation more stable and less susceptible to losses in any one area. No relationship was found between funding diversity and organisational size.

Accessing income that provides a reliable source of funding for core costs allows organisations the time to plan strategically and build meaningful relationships with their partners and their community. Most commonly groups mentioned the need for unrestricted income in order to do this.

### 3. Partnerships

Of participants, 100% agreed or strongly agreed that partnerships with other organisations are valuable. Partnerships around service delivery appeared to be the most resilient as they promote more meaningful relationships, which increase capacity, create better engagement, and foster links across the city. In contrast, some partnerships were purely pragmatic, for example to form a partnership for a funding bid. These tended to be superficial, not necessarily related to the needs of young people and could foster power imbalances. Time and funding restraints were cited as the main barrier to building meaningful partnerships.

### 4. Monitoring and evaluation

Respondents reported that funders' monitoring and evaluation requirements often don't capture the social value of the work or help organisations to demonstrate their value. During the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis, some funders relaxed reporting requirements. In most cases, organisations continued to assess the effectiveness of their service without the funder-driven requirement to do so in ways which improved with engagement with young people. Overwhelmingly, organisations were positive about the capacity they gained when not having to carry out lengthy monitoring and evaluation procedures.

### 5. Competition

The main barrier to resilience is funding competition across the sector. This not only creates direct competition for grants and contracts, but also fosters an environment which discourages collaboration. This affects resilience across all metrics in our framework. Firstly, bidding for a greater number of potentially less relevant funds wastes capacity. Secondly, it prevents meaningful partnerships and sharing practice. Finally, it means that organisations are limited in terms of capacity for strategic planning and commitment to projects which may weaken the overall stability of their services.

# Introduction

This research seeks to understand the factors that promote organisational resilience and gain insight into the barriers to developing resilience. This report explores the resilience of third sector youth organisations in Bristol through a baseline study, and a follow-up that took place just as the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 was lifted, and is the first report in an ongoing, longitudinal study. The research is part of a Bristol City Council and University of Bristol research partnership with Quartet Community Foundation.

The concept of resilience is crucial to how organisations have adapted to funding changes and how they respond to the changing needs of young people accessing council supported youth services. It is beyond the scope of this project to measure the provision of services themselves or make specific recommendations to funders or organisations. Rather, our intention was to provide a robust framework of resilience for third sector organisations providing youth services, which was generated from our first round of data collection and will be explained through our findings. Our findings cover five broad themes: **organisational structure, funding, organisational networks, community engagement** and **monitoring and evaluation**. It is the relationships between these five themes that we suggest ultimately promotes resilience, and not any single factor in isolation. Understanding these in a holistic sense gives us a deeper insight into the barriers to resilience and how they can be addressed.

This report is composed of two sets of data. The first round of data collection gave us insight into the resilience of organisations before the COVID-19 crisis. These understandings were then tested through a second, more limited, round of data collection immediately after the first national lockdown was lifted in July 2020. This report sets out these two rounds of data collection, followed by conclusions on how resilience can be fostered amongst organisations.

The research questions that form the basis of this study are:

1. What are the factors that promote organisational resilience in third sector youth organisations in Bristol?
2. What are the barriers to the realisation of organisational resilience in third sector youth organisations in Bristol?

## Bristol's Third Sector

In the face of funding cuts, it was found that nationally youth services had been cut by 66% since 2010-11 (YMCA, 2020:8). Despite nationwide youth sector funding cuts, Bristol City Council has continued to invest in the Youth Sector. Their grant funding programme, the Youth Sector Support Fund, is aimed at plugging gaps in services to young people aged 8-19, as well as supporting local youth sector groups to develop their organisational capacity. With growing demands on services, organisations must be able to assess the needs of their beneficiaries and adapt their behaviour to ensure that vulnerable young people's needs are being met and their organisation survives. The findings of this research are particularly important as they may contribute to an understanding of organisational resilience and how public sector investment can support a thriving youth sector in Bristol.

## Organisational Resilience

Across disciplines, resilience is accepted to refer broadly to the ability to deal with, respond to, or recover from threats and disturbances without compromising the inherent character of the system or organisation at risk. It is crucial to understand organisational resilience as a process, and not necessarily an outcome; it refers to the process of adaptation, mitigation and recovery

while setting priorities, and the willingness to develop in an unknown environment to survive disturbances (Bahadur, Ibrahim & Tanner, 2013; McAslan, 2010). Similarly, resilience can be conceptualised as a preparatory process in terms of readiness to adapt to unexpected changes and can be assessed, for example, by the flexibility of adaptation policies of an organisation (Foster, 2006). This report draws on and applies these conceptual understandings from other disciplines to organisations in the third sector.

Following an initial literature review, we identified four components of resilience: adaptability, organisational values, community trust, and organisational networks. These components informed our data collection through the metrics on our database and our survey questions. During this data collection, our conceptualisation of organisational resilience continually developed, to form our final framework below. Whilst not exhaustive of resilience, the concept map (see below) provides a visualisation of the key themes that emerged from our data and the relationships between these themes.

## COVID-19 Crisis

This research was initially conceived as a longitudinal study. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic began in Spring 2020, the research project was forced to adapt. Having completed the initial data collection process prior to the nation-wide lockdown in March 2020, we found ourselves with a dataset on resilience along with a unique opportunity to test our findings. As such, the research design was adapted and a second round of data was collected immediately after the lifting of the national lockdown in early July 2020. Further rounds of data collection will be carried out to analyse the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.



# Methodological approach

As a result of the sudden COVID-19 emergency and our unexpected second round of data collection, our two phases of collection have distinct methodological approaches. There are two significant differences: a shift from mixed methods to solely qualitative data collection, and an accompanying move from an inductive to deductive approach. These decisions will be explained below.

Our first phase of data collection employed a mixed methods approach. This allowed us to collect a more holistic data set by identifying information that is not available through any one single method. Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods allows for the strengths of each to be capitalised on and the weaknesses offset (Bryman, 2008). As such, we utilised three methods of data collection: a quantitative database, a survey, and a series of interviews. Whilst we acknowledge that research methods imply epistemological commitments, the overall research project will carry greater validity if the results of qualitative and quantitative data analyses corroborate each other and provide a comprehensive account of organisational resilience.

The first round of analysis took an inductive approach<sup>1</sup> in order to allow our research findings to emerge from the recurring and significant themes within the raw data. We acknowledge that data analysis can never be fully inductive and that there is an element of deductive reasoning the information of our research questions (Thomas, 2003). However, these research questions did not form a guide to analysis but rather allowed us to approach our raw data in a meaningful way that contributed to the generation of a new theory. We interpreted and categorised emerging themes into a framework through a process of constant comparison until we reached 'theoretical saturation' - the point at which no new themes emerge, and the generated theory is supported by the entire data set (Otkay, 2012).

As a result of the sudden COVID-19 emergency, we carried out a follow-up round of data collection in July 2020. We could not continue with a mixed methods approach for three main reasons: firstly, financial data was drawn from the most recent organisational records, as such the quantitative database could not be updated with new information. Secondly, as our first round of data collection had finished in February, only five months prior, it was felt that reissuing the survey would not result in significantly different responses that could not be captured in an interview alone. This ties into a final obstacle, the already limited capacity of organisations. Asking organisations to complete both a survey and an interview during a time of crisis may have reduced our response rate and placed additional strain on participants. Accordingly, we decided to collect solely qualitative data during the crisis in order to capture the immediate impacts of COVID-19.

In addition to this, for our COVID-19 data analysis there was a shift from an inductive to a deductive approach<sup>2</sup>. Whilst in our original analysis we aimed to identify and conceptualise emerging themes, our COVID-19 data collection aimed to test our existing theory. We then used the framework developed to analyse and categorise the data from the second round of interviews.

We anticipated similar broad categories and themes to emerge, as the COVID-19 crisis had potentially exacerbated the existing obstacles to resilience already identified.

<sup>1</sup> An inductive approach:

- 1) Aims to generate a new theory
- 2) Identifies and categorises emerging themes
- 3) Establishes a clear link between the raw data, the findings, and the research objectives (Thomas, 2003)

<sup>2</sup> A deductive approach:

- a) Aims to test an existing theory
- b) Develops hypotheses
- c) Begins with a general statement and comes to specific conclusions (Walliman, 2006)

# Data Collection and Analysis

## First phase of data collection, December 2019 – February 2020

Our first round of data collection encompassed a metrics database, a self-completion survey, and a series of interviews. Following this, we carried out our analysis in three steps: quantitative analysis of the survey data and specific metrics from the database in SPSS, qualitative thematic analysis of our interviews in NVivo, and finally triangulation to cross-reference the results of each analysis and identify potential relationships between metrics.

The 57 organisations initially contacted for this research were those that applied for the Youth Sector Support Fund, whether their bid was successful or not, and those that were identified by Quartet Community Foundation as 'aligned' with the aims of the YSSF. Convenience sampling gave us a clearly defined pool of organisations to contact and ensured a specific focus on youth organisations running active services within Bristol. From those who responded, we used stratified sampling to select interview participants. We split the organisations into five income brackets<sup>3</sup>, and selected organisations from each bracket at random to ensure a representative sample. Of the 14 organisations interviewed, the only group not represented was income bracket 2, those with incomes between £50,000 and £100,000 per year. All other income brackets were represented in our sample by at least two organisations.

Our first stage of data collection was to populate a quantitative metrics database that encompassed detailed funding metrics, human resources data, and basic details about the organisation. This database, which was populated using Quartet Community Foundation's records, allowed us to collect accurate and up-to-date information, providing context and specificity to our analysis.

Using organisations' accounts rather than asking survey respondents for this information means we can collect accurate data year on year and track changes. As such, this database is most useful as a tool developed longitudinally. We can build up a picture of funding changes over time and assess the impact this has on resilience. Whilst the database was used only minimally in this round of analysis as we only had one year's worth of data, we hope that future development of these metrics over time will offer greater insight.

Secondly, a self-completion survey was sent with questions relating to funding, organisational structure, organisational networks, and community trust. Two variants of this survey were sent to organisations, one to be completed by management-level staff and one to be completed by non-managerial staff. The staff survey concentrated on organisational values and community trust, whereas the management survey also included specific questions about funding, partnership formation, and training. This allowed us to capture a broader range of responses where appropriate, assess the communication within organisations, and ensure specific questions about funding were targeted at management rather than individual staff members.

<sup>3</sup>Income Brackets

Income Bracket	Rank
£0k-£50k	1
£50k-£100k	2
£100k-£500k	3
£500k-£2m	4

These two surveys were sent to 36 organisations, and in total we received 49 responses – 26 management and 23 staff surveys.

Finally, in-depth face to face interviews were carried out with a member of management from 14 of these organisations. These interviews were semi-structured, and the questions were guided by the organisation's survey response. This allowed us to better understand their responses and gain insights into their experiences. We were able to ask them to explain their organisational structure, experiences of partnership working, and how they engage with young people in much greater detail than we could have achieved through a self-response survey alone.

## Analysis

Firstly, the responses to the surveys were coded and exported to SPSS for quantitative analysis. We also imported several metrics from our database to provide basic information or fill in data gaps. These included the year an organisation was established, its income bracket, and the number of staff and volunteers it had. In SPSS, we carried out several statistical tests, such as Spearman rank and Pearson correlations, and Chi square coefficients. However, none of these tests showed any statistical significance, due partially to our small sample and partially to the minimal amount of usable quantitative data collected.

We coded open text responses, such as the responses to question 6 ("Have any paid roles become voluntary in the last five years?") into binary data. Secondly, we used our database to fill in data gaps. For example, our survey question "How many of your organisation's permanent staff have job security beyond a year?" was left as an open text response, rather than giving fixed options. Despite leading to numerical responses, such as a raw number or a percentage, these answers were not on a fixed scale and were therefore incomparable. Using human resources

metrics taken from the database allowed us to fill in missing data from the survey regarding the number of staff to volunteers, and therefore understand job security percentages.

Despite these issues, we collected enough quantitative data to provide context and further insight into the issues discussed in the interviews, particularly surrounding the accessibility of training and the reliance on core costs.

Secondly, we used NVivo to carry out thematic analysis of our interview data following a 4-step process: transcribing, familiarization, individual coding, and theme identification. We first transcribed the interviews before reading them through and making initial notes of themes and emergent issues. The transcripts were then coded on an individual basis to conceptualise and categorise the data and recognise emerging themes. Following this, the process of refinement and a holistic thematic analysis of the findings identified the most significant issues across the data and assessed their impact on organisational resilience.

The final step was to triangulate data. During this stage we used our database to group organisations according to income to provide insights related to organisational size. We also used the year group established to determine their age. This was cross-referenced when analysing the qualitative data on community engagement and sector embeddedness. Triangulation also gave us new data on human resources which we could use to inform our existing analysis on organisational structure. Regarding the financial data in the database, cross referencing our accounts data with the survey gave us useful insight into reported reserves compared to actual reserves. This demonstrated that the reserves found in the accounts are not always up to date, which influenced our reliance on accounts when writing our findings on funding. Triangulating our survey response data, interview

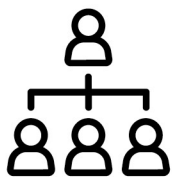
data, and database information allowed us to build a rich picture of each organisation and make more detailed claims into the nature of resilience and specific correlations between metrics.

## **Second phase of data collection (COVID-19), July 2020**

For our second round of data collection, we carried out online interviews with 8 of the 14 organisations initially contacted in our first round of interviews. As these organisations were originally selected and contacted using our sampling strategy, we are confident that this smaller sample remains representative. These interviews were 20-25 minutes long, and we asked a series of detailed questions relating to specific issues faced in the COVID-19 crisis and concerns and plans for the recovery period. Whilst our initial interview questions were much broader in scope, these questions focused specifically on the organisations' experiences of COVID-19. The same process of thematic analysis outlined above was repeated to analyse our second round of interviews.

# Main Findings

The report's findings relate to the following 5 themes:



Organisational Structure



Funding



Organisational Networks



Organisational Development



Community Engagement

## Headlines and Concept Map

- Organisations with a clear, precise mission, an appropriate model and a consistent strategy can operate effectively and cohesively across all areas of their service provision.
- A diverse portfolio of funding mitigates the impact of the loss of any one income stream, providing stability to the organisation.
- Accessing income that provides a stable source of funding for core costs allows organisations the time to plan strategically and build meaningful relationships with their partners and their community.
- Service delivery partnerships, as opposed to partnerships solely to access funding, promote more meaningful relationships, which increases capacity, creates better engagement, and fosters links across the city.
- Sharing practice means organisations can situate their services within the wider youth sector, allowing them to fill gaps and boost their internal capacity.
- Competition hinders resilience by wasting capacity and preventing cooperation across the sector.

The concept map below was created from our data to help us outline the factors that promoted or hindered organisational resilience, it also functions to visualise the relationships between them. This is not an exhaustive model of resilience, but it highlights the important themes that have emerged from our research.

From the data, five clear metrics of resilience emerged: organisational structure, funding, organisational networks, community engagement and organisational development. Within these five metrics, there are 2–3 sub-metrics. These sub-metrics are not exhaustive but are important and recurrent themes. Finally, in some cases a third tier of components further categorises the sub-metrics into smaller units. These components in isolation are not factors of resilience, but function to delineate the larger sub-metrics, allowing us to understand and analyse them more meaningfully.

Factors promoting or hindering organisational resilience emerge across all five metrics. The themes discussed in our report are drawn from the first two tiers, the metrics and sub-metrics. In some cases, sub-metrics provide self-contained understandings of resilience, whereas elsewhere the relationship between two sub-metrics is more valuable for our research. This is derived entirely by our interpretation of the data.

We will discuss each of these metrics in turn, followed by a discussion that explores the relationships between them and how resilience is promoted or hindered in third sector youth organisations.

# Concept Map





# 1. Organisational Structure

The structure of an organisation forms the basis of resilience. We understand organisational structure to be the interplay between **mission**, **model**, and **strategy**. No single structure is most resilient, rather resilience is fostered by the combination of an organisation's specificity of mission, the appropriateness of its model and consistency of its strategy. The resilience of a structure is unrelated to size or income – small, lower income organisations can have resilient structures.

An organisation's mission is its specific aim and purpose. This must be well defined and precise, and answer questions such as: what does it exist to do and who does it exist to serve? Secondly, model refers to the organising principles and structural positioning of an organisation and its services. This must be appropriate and coherent with its aim and purpose.

Finally, an organisation's strategy is the actions it takes to meet its mission in both the short- and long-term. This strategy must enact the organisation's mission consistently. These three facets cannot be understood in isolation, and resilience requires a balance of all three to function effectively and provide the foundations upon which our metrics are built.

## Mission

The most resilient organisations are those with precise missions and therefore the communities of young people they served were well defined. Whilst all charities must have charitable objectives which they are obliged to carry out, not all are concise or carried out in practice. Those who simply 'target disadvantage' do not necessarily serve a clear community.



We identified two main subcategories of mission: a focus on Communities of Interest and Communities of Place. Communities of Interest

(COI) implies a group of young people who share experiences, characteristics, or common interests, whilst Communities of Place (COP) applies to location-based organisations which are run for the benefit of young people in a specific geographical area. Whilst some organisations serve a combination of the two, e.g. supporting young carers from a specific area, it is clear that the mission is to support the young carers, rather than people from the area itself. A specific mission leads to a coherent and cohesive community with which an organisation is engaged.

Those organisations with vague missions appear to struggle more with securing targeted funds. This means an organisation's services are easily adaptable to whatever the current funding trend appears to be. If there is interest in providing funds for mental health services, it follows this trend, rather than applying for grants or creating services geared towards its existing mission. Organisations which lack clarity of mission are

more susceptible to bending their mission in the face of funding trends. As one organisation put it, “[they] dilute what they’re great at”. The drive to financially sustain themselves in the short term overrules carrying out their specific aim and purpose. Whilst it is desirable for organisations to be creative and adaptive with their services, the tendency to broaden or diversify services away from their core *raison d’être* can lead to a weakened service provision.

Mission has an impact on an organisation’s engagement with its community. If an organisation’s mission is vague, then there exists no fixed and stable community of young people with which it can engage. Often the smallest organisations have the most specific mission, tackling specific needs. Providing fewer, but higher quality, services that respond to need is the foundation of resilience for small

organisations. As one organisation said, “we’re small and we want to focus”. More focused services often aren’t eligible for a wide variety of funding, but those they do qualify for are more likely to be successful.

## Model

The most resilient organisations are those which had models which were appropriate for their mission. Three subcomponents emerged from the data around organisational model. The first two, pop-up and location-based models, are types of models themselves. Pop-up models often do not have a static base, and instead provide specific services across the city. Location-based models run the majority of their services from a centralised location within the community

they serve. These two models often work in conjunction, where an organisation that runs pop-up sessions brings its services or expertise into a location-based organisation. Whilst other models exist for youth organisations, our data demonstrates a clear pattern of the two working in parallel. The third subcomponent is staff structure, which is key to understanding the appropriateness of an organisation’s model

in practice. Model is the way that an organisation’s mission is carried out, and so the most effective models are those that serve the relevant community in a way that is appropriate for service users.

A model is appropriate if it aligns with an organisation’s mission. If an organisation stated its mission was to serve a community of place, i.e. a specific postcode, it would be inappropriate if it based its sessions on the other side of the city. Contrastingly, an

organisation which aims to serve a community of interest would have an appropriate model if it ran pop-up sessions in the areas that its community of young people already accessed, allowing it to amplify its reach and ensure it was meeting needs. One organisation ran this type of model very successfully; it had a clear mission that identified a community of interest spread across the city. It had a centrally located base where it ran sessions for those in that area, but also ran several pop-ups per week that replicated its sessions further afield, ensuring that it accessed as much of its community as possible. In addition, using latent structures which young people already access such as schools, youth clubs, and local community spaces, it cultivated relationships with these organisations so it could provide pop-up services to the young people where they felt comfortable.

**The tendency to broaden or diversify services away from their core *raison d’être* can lead to a weakened service provision**



This allowed the organisation to maximise its capacity and provide high-quality services to a community of interest spread across the city.

The way an organisation structures its staff and volunteers should fit with its model. Of our survey respondents, 50% reported that they rely on volunteers for their core function, saying the overall cost to run a session wouldn't be possible without volunteers. However, this does not in itself indicate non-resilient ways of working. Use of volunteers in combination with staff can be stable and sustainable if appropriate to organisational model. Several organisations reported having key members of staff who were joined by volunteers to carry out sessions. In this way, the use of volunteers is to increase capacity and engage more service users, rather than for the core provision itself. For example, the organisation discussed above had a high ratio of volunteers to staff. This was crucial to its pop-up model, in which a member of staff runs the session supported by volunteers. All sessions are delivered by a trained member of staff, ensuring they're high quality, but capacity and engagement with young people is increased.

Larger organisations often employed more strategic staff such as communications staff, bid writers and volunteer coordinators. These organisations with dedicated strategic staff may have more capacity to analyse their ways of working, engage with service users and more efficiently access grants. However, for many small organisations, "frontline staff were also strategic staff". Whilst it is not feasible, or necessary, for many smaller organisations to employ so many strategic staff, having a clear staff structure increases capacity and ensures that services are

being provided effectively, reaching the young people who need them. Equally, retention of committed staff is important for resilience. 100% of organisations who reported making staff roles voluntary were in the lower income brackets (those with a total income of less than £500,000 per year). All these organisations explained this was due to a lack of funding. For example, one

survey respondent told us that "paid roles become voluntary when budgets don't meet their commitments", suggesting that for smaller organisations, staff's job security is dependent on specific project budgets.

**100% of organisations who reported making staff roles voluntary, were in the lower income brackets**

## Strategy

Finally, we identified two types of strategy. Firstly, an organisation carries out a

short-term strategy through its existing processes and systems for providing a service. Secondly, strategy can be understood as long-term thinking, involving planning and wider reflection. Both are important for a successful organisational strategy, and both must clearly carry out the mission of the organisation. Failure to do so can lead to a waste of human and financial capacity, as well as a less successful service for young people. Some organisations struggled to be consistent with their current strategy, adapting their services to each individual that walked through the door rather than focusing on providing services that meet the needs of their specific community. Expanding services on an ad-hoc basis based on the needs of one or two individuals means that an organisation's portfolio of services and selection of staff can become incoherent with its proposed mission. Trying to solve every small-scale problem could risk moving away from serving the core interests of the majority of young people. In this situation, signposting to other organisations for individual's needs could help each organisation

keep their strategy in line with their mission. We found that long-term consistency of strategy supports organisational resilience. Whilst all organisations had to make decisions about where to spend time applying for grants, the most resilient organisations were particularly strategic with opportunities; “with four or five things presented how do we make a choice about what we put our resources into?”

One organisation, which had a particularly precise mission, serving a clearly delineated community of young people, said its strategy looking forward was “to be where we are now”, demonstrating that innovation was not always the mark of a resilient organisation. Balancing the

**“Innovation was not always the mark of a resilient organisation”**

need to adapt to changing needs and an evolving sector implies an element of stability in strategy, ensuring all strategic planning is consistent with mission and model.

## Summary

A strong organisational structure forms the foundations of resilience for third sector organisations. No single structure promotes resilience, nor does organisational size solely dictate capacity. Rather, the specificity of an organisation’s mission, the appropriateness of its model, and consistency of its strategy fostered resilience in organisations. The most resilient organisations were those which had precise missions and therefore the communities of young people they served were clear and well defined.

These organisations’ models were effective at carrying out services because they were fit for purpose, with appropriate systems, processes, and staff to serve their relevant communities. Strategically, their portfolio of services fitted coherently with their missions and used their capacity and resources efficiently. Strategic planning could allow them to sustainably address the developing needs of their service users and build organisational capacity.



## 2. Funding

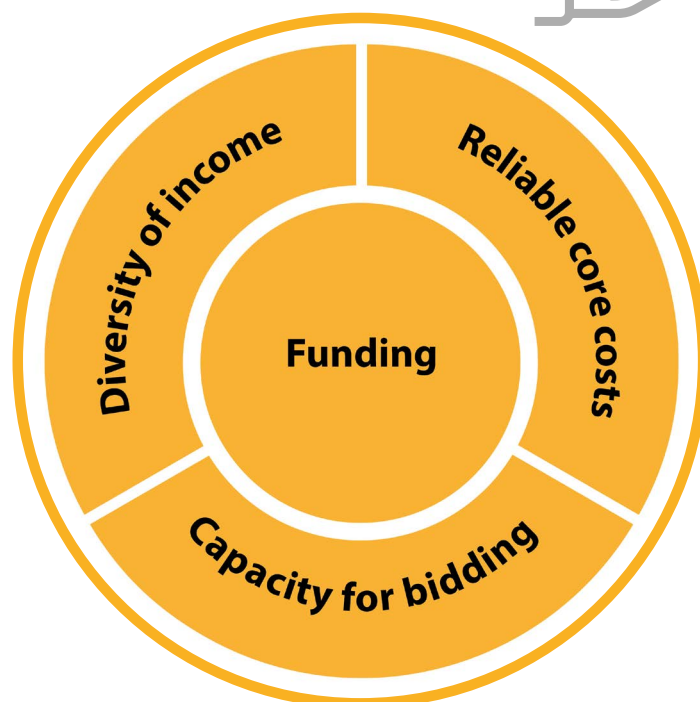
Funding has persisted as one of the key components of resilience, and it is not surprising that an organisation with healthy and reliable funding will be more resilient in a crisis. However, we do not claim that higher income leads to a more resilient organisation and we have attempted to understand the nuances of the relationship between funding and resilience.

Three main elements of funding emerged from our analysis: **funding diversity**, **unrestricted income**, and **capacity for applying for funding bids**. Limited capacity in an increasingly competitive funding environment means that most organisations struggle to achieve a diverse range of funding, and so remain reliant on fewer, less stable sources of income.

### Diversity of funding

One way to mitigate the impact of a volatile economy could be to have a diversified portfolio of funding. Funding diversity is the extent to which an organisation relies on a variety of income sources, whether this be grant funding, contracts, traded income, donations, or any other funding streams. A balanced distribution of income sources could ensure relative stability in the face of loss of any one source.

For example, one organisation told us that it “[tries] a mixture of national grants and multi-year grants and we try to use that to unlock match funding from more local sources”, as well as running a trading arm that “bring[s] in a little extra that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to [bring in]”. Contrastingly, those that rely on a single income source may be more precarious. Whilst there has been a move towards using traded income, sole reliance on this still leads to instability and limits resilience in the face of possible economic downturns.



Interestingly, there seems to be no correlation between funding diversity and the size of an organisation; 65% of all respondents agree or strongly agree that they are dependent on only a few funding sources, and these respondents are distributed equally across all income brackets. Our data shows that 70% of respondents have accessed training in funding and fundraising, suggesting that organisations’ inability to diversify income is not a result of lack of knowledge or training. However, organisations said it was beneficial if they could access not simply general youth-focused funding but also funds to do with their specific mission, such as from PHE, Sport England, the Arts Council, and MIND. This could suggest that the funding diversity of an organisation is not related to its size but to the specificity of its mission and how consistently it carries this out, and those which consistently translate their mission into their model and strategy could be more likely to be successful in funding bids.

## Reliable Core Costs

The current funding environment is focussed primarily on project-based income, and this means that organisations do not have the flexibility or freedom to spend beyond the scope of their projects. Unrestricted income emerged from our data as a key concern for organisations: 64% of interviewees spoke about the issues of relying on restricted income, such as a lack of continuity in services and a lack of reliable funding for core costs.

The scarcity of reliable funding for core costs has meant that service provision necessarily runs from project to project, and the critical period of reflection in between is not funded. Organisations have less time to step back and look at their offer holistically to identify gaps and ensure they are providing effective, needs-led services. In turn, this prevents long-term strategic thinking. As a result of the short-termism that project-based funding imposes, organisations are less able to adapt to developing needs. The lack of funded 'reflection time' means that organisations may not have the capacity to engage with service users to find out how they could improve their services, and this weakens their resilience (see section on Community Engagement).

The unwillingness to cover core costs has particularly impacted Community of Place organisations, which are likely to have greater core costs if they have a location-based model. However, pop-up organisations that do not have a fixed location are still indirectly affected through their partnerships.

For example, one organisation told us that over the years some of its partners had gone bust or faced funding challenges, and that the "uncertainty for the long-term viability of different partnerships definitely affects our capacity to forward plan". Despite not experiencing these struggles itself, its ability to forward plan is hindered as a result of their partner's instability. In addition, the unrestricted funds which allow organisations the freedom to build robust and

appropriate partnerships are hard to secure, undermining the positive benefits that partnership working has on service provision and the wider sector.

Those organisations with property assets saw they were valuable, but also commented that funders were not willing to pay the core costs needed for maintenance. However,

managing and renting rooms in a community space can be a good way of generating income. Crucially, traded income is a source of unrestricted income that can be relied on to cover core costs, and so organisations that were able to generate traded income have more flexibility to invest in their organisation and pursue new projects at their own initiative.

## Capacity for bidding for funds

Many organisations commented on the wasted time and capacity spent bidding for funds. This meant many of their operations were funding led, rather than needs led. Competition in the sector for funding is one of the biggest barriers to resilience. The scarcity of funds means organisations 'cast their net wide', applying for funds that don't necessarily fit with their mission, which could lead to their services not fulfilling their charitable aims.

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Shorter-term contracts have been particularly challenging for organisations attempting to make a long-term strategic plan. An organisation told us that short-term contracts can be “really challenging in terms of long-term planning for trustees [...] if its only 12 or 24 months then it’s up for tender again it’s really hard to convince a trustee board that you should commit time or resources when you have so little capacity already”. As such, organisations get caught in a cycle of applying for short-term funding for short-term projects and are less able to invest in long-term service provision. In turn, they waste additional capacity applying for funds more frequently, hindering effective service provision.

## Summary

Organisations that appear to be more resilient are those which have a diverse portfolio of funding which mitigates the damage done by the loss of any single income stream. However, one of the main barriers to resilience for many organisations is capacity for writing funding bids when competition is so high. This is exacerbated by the trend for smaller, more short-term grants. Often organisations diluted their mission in order to access more grants, which wasted capacity and reduced the effectiveness of their service provision.

Many organisations lack the capacity needed to spend time on developing meaningful partnerships and strategic planning due to a lack of core costs. The most resilient organisations often had unrestricted traded income that could be put towards core costs; however, this must still form part of a range of income sources and cannot be relied on in isolation.

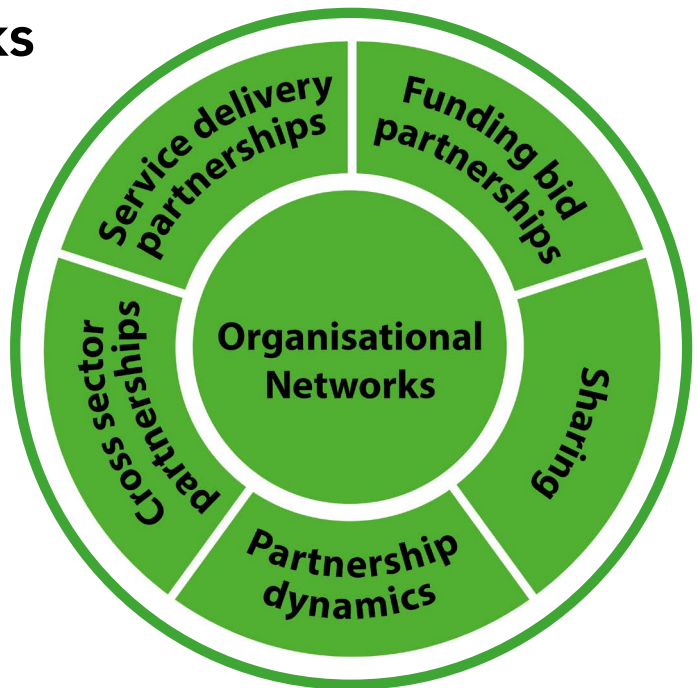


### 3. Organisational Networks

Our literature review suggested that partnerships were crucial to resilient ways of working, and this was confirmed through both our survey responses and our first round of interviews; 100% of interviewees spoke about partnerships in some form, and it became the most frequently coded finding. During our analysis we initially coded for the nature and purpose of partnerships to understand how and why people work in partnership.

From this broad category, four distinct types of partnerships emerged: **partnerships for the purpose of the co-delivery of services, partnerships created for funding bids, sharing practice, and cross-sector partnerships.** In addition, much of our interview data on partnerships was not fully captured by these codes and this led us to create a further code on **partnership dynamics.** This allowed us to analyse the dynamics of each type of partnership and the impact this has on resilience.

We define service delivery partnerships as those which focus on co-delivery of services, in contrast to funding partnerships which are designed or proposed in order to fulfil a funding bid requirement or to increase chances of securing funding. Whilst co-delivery is likely to involve a joint funding bid, the intention is the co-delivery itself rather than simply securing funding. Sharing practice partnerships are informal relationships that are mostly communicative, with the intent to share information, ideas and best practices. Finally, cross-sector partnerships refer to partnerships either with businesses or organisations that work in other sectors. We will analyse each of these partnerships in turn.



#### Service delivery

Service delivery appears to be the most effective form of partnerships for three main reasons: they provide direct services to young people, they improve community engagement, and they create links across the sector. This emphasis on community rooted co-delivery strengthens the resilience of the organisations involved to a much greater extent than funding partnerships, in which the motivation tends to be superficial and often doesn't necessarily address young people's needs.

Firstly, service delivery partnerships tend to be built with the intention to provide direct services, allowing organisations to bring expertise or specialist support into their communities.

One organisation told us that when forming a partnership, it was important first to assess needs and respond to them by finding an organisation that could provide more specific or niche services:

“it’s our job to find the experts in whatever we’re doing, and get them either to bring their services into the area, or support them to bring their services into the area”. Not only can this improve the breadth and depth of services offered to young people, but it can also increase capacity for both organisations by increasing the reach of the visiting expert organisation and freeing up human capacity for the host organisation. This way of working “makes local provision more than it would otherwise be able to be, enhancing what other organisations on very tight budgets can do”.

Additionally, joint service delivery could reduce excess set up costs and staff presence, meaning each organisation has greater time and funding that can be directed elsewhere. For example, one organisation reported hiring as a partnership “a worker that’s gonna work 50% there, 50% here to coordinate between us as organisations”. Similarly, another organisation told us that “some of the workers said that if we hadn’t been there [as a partner] then the centre would have opened less hours as a whole, because we bring members of staff [and] extra volunteers”, showing that working in partnership can lead to an increase in capacity to provide services that are higher quality and more stable in the long term.

Secondly, the additional reach into the community that service delivery partnership work can offer is vital for increasing engagement and responding effectively to needs. These partnerships build on each organisation’s established trusted relationships with young people. An interviewee described this process as building on the “credibility” of the partner organisation so that

they are “almost there ambassadoring” in an environment in which young people already feel secure. Working in this way can increase both capacity and engagement, allowing an organisation to access a community it otherwise wouldn’t reach. One organisation told us that, as a hosting community organisation, its job is to “look at the demand, we look at what capacity you’ve got, and how do we help you spread further in the area, increase the capacity or provide better services”. Integrating joint capacity building into

co-delivery increases resilience for both organisations and can help ensure the services they provide are responsive and high quality.

Finally, creating new partnerships focused on service delivery increases reach into communities across the city. Understanding what other organisations are offering allows the sector to look at the bigger picture and “see the dots that need joining up”. Several organisations described their positioning as

a broker between young people and statutory services and told us that to do that you have to “embrace co-production” and work within the context of the youth sector.

Whilst all of our survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that partnerships are valuable to their organisation, 12% of respondents then went on to say that they did not have the capacity to form such partnerships due to time and funding constraints. One organisation responded that they find it “challenging to give senior staff the time to do the crucial preliminary work as this building block stage isn’t funded”. It takes significant time and effort “to build relationships with a whole new group of people, different

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organisations, different management structures, different opening hours and make sure we can adapt our service and what we can offer”, and if organisations lack time, funding, or capacity overall, it is this stage that falls away.

Similarly, an interviewee told us that partnership working was “about making choices [...] about the relationship of the partnership”. There is a significant amount of work that could be co-delivered, but each organisation needs to examine whether they have the service user base and capacity to be delivering such services in partnership. It is this relationship building stage that is central to embedded co-delivery. Organisations reported that they are reliant on not only their stability but indirectly on the stability of their partners, and meaningful, reciprocal, and integrated relationships are key to mitigating the risks associated with this dependency.

## Funding-bid partnerships

These partnerships are established with the intent to secure funding. This is often incentivised within the current funding environment, which risks positioning service provision as an indirect aim. Many interviewees expressed a pragmatism behind forming funding partnerships, reporting that as funders increasingly insist on joint bids it makes strategic sense to apply as a partnership even if there is no intent to follow through in any substantial way. One organisation told us that in a recent successful joint bid they had “given out more [funds] than we’d kept, but we wouldn’t have got the bit we’ve kept if we hadn’t done a partnership”. This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees who described funding partnerships as “self-interest[ed]” and “blatant opportunism”, although necessary within the current funding environment.

Whilst one organisation reported a purely pragmatic funding bid developing into a genuine service delivery partnership over time, this seems to be the exception. The partnerships that these funding bid requirements foster often do not have the needs of the community at their core, as the projects are shaped to fit the funding needs rather than young people’s needs. There seems to be a similarly weak relationship between the partners themselves due to a lack of communication and relationship building that is required for service delivery partnerships; one organisation told us it had been put on bids it had never seen alongside organisations it had never spoken to.

Our data showed that funding bids are often marked by an imbalance of power between partners. It was reported that this happened in various ways, such as one organisation voluntarily or involuntarily taking on the bulk of the work, organisations being pressured into doing work that they don’t feel is in the best interests of their young people, or being named as ‘bid candy’ – a situation in which often smaller organisations with good local reputations are put on a bid to increase the chances of success for other organisations involved. One organisation told us that “the power rests where the money is [and] that’s where decisions are usually made”, suggesting that smaller organisations added to funding bids often already lack the influence to question these choices or suggest new ways of working. An interviewee reported experiences where other organisations “use us for our social capital [...] we’re often included in things that are probably not serving our community all that well”. These dynamics can divert the often already stretched capacity of the organisations involved away from service provision or prevent them from taking other, more valuable opportunities, weakening their overall offer and resilience.



It is often the case that organisations are incentivised to work in partnership through higher funding awards for partnership bids. When organisations lack the capacity to build genuine co-delivery due to time or funding constraints, such an offer from funders can drive the formation of superficial funding bids. Whilst we do not suggest that all partnerships formed for pragmatic funding purposes are entirely worthless, there is a worrying trend in our data that suggests these partnerships increase cases of 'bid candy' and lack the responsiveness to community needs that informs effective service provision.

## Sharing practice

Several organisations reported that they formed part of informal associations with other organisations to share information. The most prominent form of sharing practice that emerged was support for funding bids, although sharing policies, training support, and safeguarding procedures was also common. Several organisations told us that they "swap funding applications and fundraising strategies with people", allowing both organisations to recognise what was successful or unsuccessful about a bid, and reflect on how they could approach fundraising differently or reframe their offer.

Many interviewees expressed that these relationships tended to be collaborative rather than competitive, either because the organisations were based in separate geographical locations, or they each had clearly defined missions that separated their services and their communities. These communicative networks allow organisations to better understand where their services fit on the city-wide map of youth service provision. These networks mean organisations can "link up and join up services and have proper pathways between, instead of

everyone doing their own thing". Understanding the sector landscape and the services that other organisations provide means that an organisation can examine and improve its own services, so its offer is specific and fills gaps. Part of this process is making referrals – if an organisation doesn't have the expertise or capacity to meet a specific need, it can signpost service users to others who can. One organisation summed this up as "being small but perfectly formed in terms of the delivery and knowing where it fits in terms of the rest of the city [...] even if the actual delivery might be just us, the context has to be a partnership because we have to know what other people are doing". If an organisation has links across the city, it can situate its services within the wider youth sector and minimise direct competition.

However, several organisations reported that the current funding environment posed a significant obstacle to realising this city-wide ethos of communication and sharing practice. As funding opportunities tighten, organisations talk about being in "co-opetition". Interviewees told us that for an effective and cohesive sector "there must always be an element of partnership, there must always be an element of honesty", but that "most people aren't going to share their best ideas because deep down it's a competition". There was fear that "not everyone is gonna play the game how it should be played", and this held organisations back from forming meaningful collaborative links and sharing ideas and support. Forcing organisations to become insular rather than collaborate and make referrals means that they are not providing the most necessary services that are specific to the needs of their communities of young people, and this decreases resilience. Ultimately, this damages service provision and resilience on both an individual basis and across the sector.

## Cross-sector partnerships

In addition to these internal sector relationships, multiple organisations spoke to us about new cross-sector links. Partnerships with local universities emerged as important local links, particularly within the context of increased demands for monitoring and evidencing social value. However, the most reported cross-sector connections were those with businesses, including trading and development work.

As businesses express more of an interest in helping their local community, third sector organisations have identified an opportunity for support. One organisation told us “a lot of those businesses are extremely keen to be involved [as] they don’t have access to the community”, but such relationships can often be shallow. Crucially then, the organisation has “learnt to ask businesses for what we want rather than what they offer”, to create a deeper and mutually beneficial relationship. These relationships deepen the links

across the city as a whole and provide support that organisations otherwise might not have been able to access, such as specialist services or financial investment, and in doing so increase capacity.

### Summary

Overall, partnerships can build capacity, allowing organisations to create links within the sector and a new community of young people, enhance their offer, and continue to respond more effectively to the needs of young people across the city. However, building these partnerships is capacity intensive, and organisations reported that the main challenge they faced was a lack of time and funding for the crucial foundation stage. When this is paired with higher funding awards for partnership applications, it can drive the formation of less meaningful funding partnerships. The existing funding environment seems to be actively hostile towards more resilient service-delivery

partnerships, whilst promoting shallow funding partnerships that may not serve young people’s needs.

Increasingly, organisations spoke to us about turning to alternative forms of partnerships, such as cross-sector and sharing practice. These networks allow the sector to improve by recognising that individual services fit together to form a unified city-wide youth provision. This collaboration seems to be overwhelmingly positive, improving individual and sector resilience, filling gaps, and meeting the changing needs of young people.



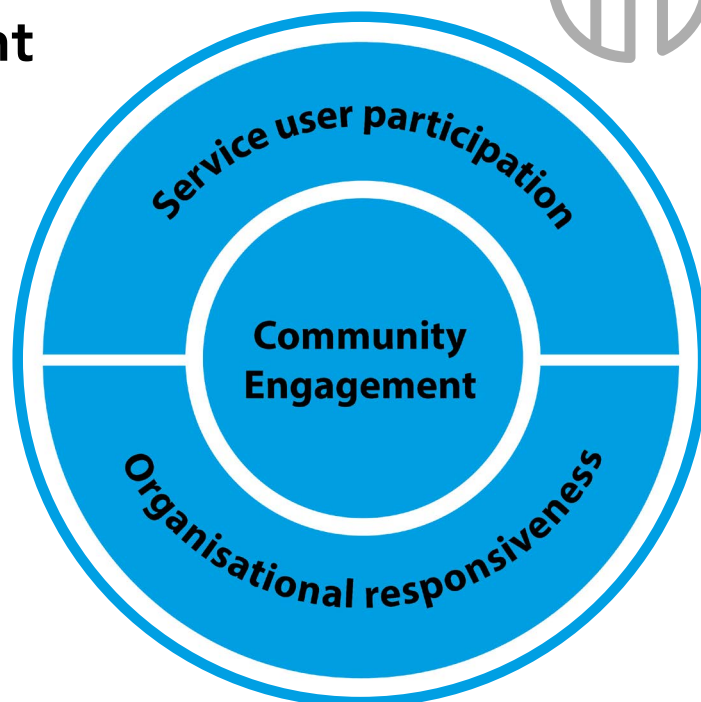
## 4. Community Engagement

Community engagement is a particularly nebulous concept, and quantifying it extends beyond the scope of this research. It is unsurprising that 100% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were trusted within their community, but without the input of the young people themselves this is a difficult claim to establish.

After initially coding our interview data for community trust as a general code, **service user involvement** and **organisational responsiveness** emerged as a more meaningful way to analyse the relationship between engagement and resilience. We define community engagement as the extent to which an organisation is active within the community it serves, and the way in which it creates a dialogue to allow young people to shape the services they need.

It is crucial to understand that community engagement is a two-way process between the service users and the organisation itself. On one side, the young people using the service need to be actively involved in shaping the provision of the organisation and, on the other, the organisation needs to be responsive to needs and provide opportunities for young people to shape these services.

These processes of service user involvement and organisational responsiveness need to be understood in conjunction, as it is the balance and interplay between them that fosters resilience in organisations. Furthermore, it means organisations provide the most relevant and targeted services and ensure capacity is used effectively.



### Service User Involvement and Organisational Responsiveness

The sub-metric service user involvement seeks to capture whether the young people have a degree of agency over the service provision and actively involve themselves in its design and execution. This implies that 'service users' are more than just that – they do not simply access services passively, but communicate their needs, shape the service, and give ongoing feedback about how it could improve. Indeed the very term 'service users' excludes an important relationship between the young person, their agency and the organisation that offers 'services'. This can manifest in many ways, depending on the organisation's mission, the age of the young people involved, and the capacity of the organisation. However, most interviewees told us that fundamentally, community engagement revolved around "finding out what the need is and then shaping the solution with them, so they end up being the change that they wanna see".

This goes one step beyond the simpler processes of consultation or feedback in allowing the young people to claim agency over the provision and suggest new and innovative services that they want.

This involvement has to be met with responsiveness from the organisation. Several organisations told us that young people are “so energised” and “so invested in what we do”, but if an organisation fails to respond to this energy, young people become disillusioned and you have to “fight pretty hard to get that interesting engagement” back.

For service users to claim agency over the process and feel a sense of ownership, they must have a tangible opportunity to do so. This can take various forms, from informal conversations, to a young people’s board, to sessions dedicated to

**Community engagement is a two-way process between the service users and the organisation itself**

new ideas. These spaces differ, but they all focus on opening a dialogue. One organisation told us that introducing time at the beginning and end of sessions for young people to speak about what they want increased the “richness” of its offer, and that it can “definitely feel [the young people] moulding and shaping the way people are speaking and the things that are happening”.

This connection can help ensure the relevance of a service, resulting in more stable services rooted in need.

## Summary

Community engagement is a vital element of resilience for third sector organisations and must be understood as a two-way process in which young people are encouraged to become active participants. This is facilitated by the responsiveness of the organisation itself, and the extent to which it provides forums for creativity and dialogue, rather than simply providing a passive, top-down service.

Community engagement is a powerful driver of resilience as it ensures the organisation is well rooted and continuously providing specific, necessary, and relevant services to an engaged community of young people.



## 5. Organisational Development

Organisational development is the positive steps an organisation takes to reflect on its own structures and processes to improve its service. We are aware that there are many forms of organisational development but **monitoring and evaluation** and **training** emerged from our data as most relevant to resilience. These processes contribute to resilience as they allow an organisation to critically reflect on its practices and ensure its services continue to be effective and needs led.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation refers to both internal and external processes to track and assess the effectiveness and quality of service provision. This is often an external funding requirement, but it is also an intrinsically valuable way for an organisation to analyse its provision and develop its services to ensure they are effective and responsive to young people's needs.

Internal monitoring and evaluation ensure that the processes by which an organisation delivers its services are effective in meeting project outcomes and young people's needs.

One organisation reported that "before all the sessions there's a pre-brief, after there's a debrief, the staff get supervision, there's team meetings, so there's always developmental work going on". Similarly, another told us that it was developing a 'theory of change' so that "anything we do we can work back to our charitable objects to make sure that we're actually working to achieve those". Through internal assessments, such as these, an organisation can ensure it is working directly towards its strategic goals and providing the highest quality services to its community of young people.



External monitoring and evaluation assess the outcomes of an organisation's work, rather than its internal operations. Many organisations reported that it is difficult to tangibly assess social value, particularly when their missions are preventative. As several interviewees expressed, it is difficult because they are "trying to capture the absence of something happening". This is made harder by increasingly quantitative reporting requirements that don't fully capture the social value of a service. One organisation captured a sentiment that was expressed by all interviewees:

"we know if we were shut, anti-social behaviour would go through the roof... but how do we tangibly prove that?". The shift towards over-quantified reporting means that organisations are "having to work hard to over justify what for many years has been accepted as a really valuable thing for the community". When organisations spend time jumping through unnecessary hoops, it wastes capacity that could be used to carry out service provision or engage more meaningfully with young people, and this ultimately weakens resilience.

Despite these difficulties, some organisations report that funding requirements encourage them to reflect where they otherwise wouldn't. The most resilient organisations carry out critical reflection because it is intrinsically good for the service, not just for funding requirements. Ultimately, whilst over-quantified monitoring has become a necessity for funding, the process of reflection and improvement is undeniably positive. It allows organisations to ensure their services are high-quality and serving the specific needs of their community of young people.

**There is always development work going on**

However, organisations report that they struggle with the capacity to carry out training, and that taking the time to access the support on offer has been deprioritized. We identified that the organisations that accessed no training all

had incomes below £500,000 (income brackets 1-3). Contrastingly, all those that accessed the most training available to them were in the higher income brackets, defined as an income of over £500,000 per year. As such, size, and its associated capacity, can be seen to affect access to training to a certain extent. Despite the availability of training across the sector, the accessibility of this training for small organisations remains a barrier to resilience.

## Training

Overall, a lack of training availability did not appear to be a barrier to resilience. Of our survey respondents, 88% accessed at least one type of training. As one organisation put it, there has been "an arms race amongst the charity sector" in terms of training. Our data shows that there is a wide range of training currently on offer, and organisations report that the quality of their funding applications is higher by consequence.

## Summary

Organisations that effectively monitor and evaluate their work are more resilient, as their services can be more responsive to young people's needs and use capacity effectively.

The accessibility or offer of training does not seem to be a barrier to resilience, but there is a correlation between resilience and those that do access training, since usually training is limited by time and capacity.

# Follow up COVID-19 analysis

Our COVID-19 data analysis is a follow up to our initial findings, where our interpretations and claims could be re-analysed after organisations faced a serious test of their resilience. Analysing how they approached this and how they emerged looking into the recovery period is key to understanding organisational resilience in a holistic sense. This second round of data analysis was conducted in line with our conceptualisation of organisation resilience as elaborated in our original interpretations, using the five key metrics of organisational structure, funding, organisational networks, community engagement and organisational development. In this round of data analysis, we took a deductive approach in order to test the theory generated by our first round of data. We anticipated that the COVID-19 crisis had potentially exacerbated the existing barriers to resilience identified in our first round of data analysis.

## 1. Organisational Structure

Within a small window, organisations had to adapt their services to the reality of lockdown. Among other things, this tested the strength of their organisational structure: their mission, model, and strategy.

### Model

Of the organisations we spoke to, only 12.5% stopped all service provision, and another 12.5% adapted all of their services for online provision. The remaining 75% reported adapting some services for online provision whilst other services had to stop running over the period.

Interestingly, all the organisations we spoke to either adapted to virtual provision or stopped running services, with no other major adaptations. 25% did report creating activity packs that were

dropped off to young people, but this was a new service introduced to supplement their online service provision, which continued to be their main offer over the lockdown period.

The organisations that appeared to adapt most effectively to the COVID-19 measures were those which ensured their online provision was based on what young people found easiest to use, or on platforms they already accessed. These organisations tended to adopt a wider range of online platforms, which may have helped them engage with the greatest number of service users possible. Whilst using a wider range of platforms might lead to a less cohesive online offer that requires more capacity to manage, organisations told us that during this time their priority was to support as many of their service users as they could. For example, one organisation told us that “we began to adapt really quickly using Zoom, using WhatsApp, using text messages, good old standard phone calls, and just really just trying to keep in contact with all the young people in the ways that they found best and easiest to do”. In some cases, this meant a temporary pausing of services as organisations and their service users adjusted. However, prioritising communication with service users gave the organisation the time and space to adapt its services whilst not losing the engagement of young people. Another organisation reported that “we had a first phase of closing services making sure everyone was safe, getting in touch with service users [...] and then we paused and said based on what we know now and what is shut how can we do it [adapt] on a service by service basis”. These strategic decisions may have helped them ensure that their online provision remained in line with their mission and responsive to the developing needs of their communities.

Adapting services for online provision implies a change in model. Whilst our original framework distinguished between pop-up and

location-based models, this distinction becomes far less relevant when all organisations are providing services remotely. This is highly specific to the coronavirus crisis and does not suggest that our initial interpretation around the importance and appropriateness of model is invalid. We anticipate that as organisations head into phased reopening of their services that these sub-metrics of model will become significant again.

## Staff Structure

Under our initial framework, an organisation's staff structure comprises one element of model. Throughout the lockdown period, the furlough scheme presented organisations with decisions around staff structure that we understand as part of an organisation's strategy as well as their model. Of the organisations we spoke to, 50% accessed the furlough scheme. It is interesting to note that, of those who used the scheme, no organisation furloughed their entire staff team. Analysing the reasons behind furloughing staff could provide an insight into an organisation's ongoing strategy.

Of the organisations that didn't furlough, there were several reasons cited: one organisation shut down completely and so wasn't employing any staff, some organisations reported staff were not eligible for furlough, and others reported that their funders had guaranteed ringfenced staff costs so furloughing would not have provided any financial benefit. This demonstrates that for some organisations, furloughing was not necessary or appropriate. However, this does not indicate a lack of resilience when faced with the COVID-19 crisis.

**50% accessed the furlough scheme**

Of those that did access the furlough scheme, they all expressed approaching this in a strategic manner in order to retain enough staff to continue some adapted service provision and continue to support their community. The number of staff furloughed therefore varied between organisations depending on the services they provided. One organisation that ran a lot of services in schools told us that "at one point we had half the staff team furloughed", as there was no way to adapt these services when schools were shut. Other organisations told us similarly that they furloughed a minimal number of staff and kept strategic staff working, to help them adapt to the measures whilst still carrying out their mission. This decision to keep staff on was often constrained by the financial health of the organisation. One organisation explained its hesitance to furlough: "obviously [furloughing] massively affects your capacity to achieve your charitable mission and to adapt your services and bring in more funding". The difficulty in balancing the financial incentive to furlough with the need to continue vital services for the community was echoed throughout our interviews. Another organisation, that lost significant amounts of traded income, told us that "[on] a purely commercial sale we should have furloughed everybody [...] but the difficulty is that we're a charity and times like this are why we exist, to support our community". These organisations made short-term decisions based on long-term strategic thinking, even if this appeared to be financially risky.



## Strategy

Long- and short-term decision making was a recurrent theme in our data. In our interviews, all organisations spoke about strategy, with 50% of them explicitly discussing the difficulty of balancing long- and short-term decision making. For example, one organisation told us that one of its partners was planning to restart in-person provision when the lockdown restrictions eased. However, it told us that “we’re not gonna re-establish small groups at the moment [...] we might be put into local lockdown in three weeks if we have another outbreak. It’s too disruptive to the staff team and the young people”. This may suggest that a resilient organisation balances the immediate need to adapt with long-term considerations about what is best for their service users. This can ensure that an organisation’s long-term strategic planning is consistent with its mission and model.

## 2. Funding

Funding persisted as the primary concern of organisations, with all interviewees demonstrating pessimism about securing funds in the future. The organisations that we spoke to reported that the lockdown measures led to some funders withdrawing their offer, whilst other funders followed through on their original funding commitments.

### Diversity of funding

Our original finding that resilient organisations will have a diversified portfolio of funding has been supported by our second round of data analysis. Accessing a variety of income sources could mitigate the impact of the loss of any one income stream. There has been a move towards generating traded income in recent years in order to secure unrestricted funds, however the COVID-19 lockdown led to a loss of traded

income. Of the organisations we spoke to, 50% had at least one source of traded income, and all report losing a significant amount, if not all, of this income over the immediate crisis. One organisation told us that “nearly 70% of the way we get money is through generating it [...] so when [COVID-19] hit and businesses were shutting down it all got pulled. So that, from a cashflow position, left us with 2 months to die really”. This supports our original interpretation that sole reliance on any one source of income, including traded income, can make organisations more vulnerable in times of crisis. An organisation which reported its financial model was based on trading told us that it “has obviously come to bite us big time when we had to close down [and] we lost about 80% of our income”. Whilst traded income can help foster resilience, it has to form part of a diverse portfolio of funding to mitigate financial losses.

### Reliable Core Costs

Finally, many of the organisations we spoke to had to fall back on reserves to fund their operations through the lockdown period. Access to reserves was vital for many organisations, which otherwise would not have survived long enough to access emergency or recovery grants, let alone have the capacity to apply for them. The organisations we spoke to all have a policy of 3-6 months’ worth of reserves, but it was clear that those with more than this were better able to make long-term strategic decisions without fearing they would suddenly run out of money. This ties into the larger issue surrounding core costs; one benefit of reserves is that they are unrestricted, meaning organisations are free to use them wherever they felt necessary. Organisations that are able to reliably fund their core operations have more time and flexibility to engage in strategic work, form more meaningful relationships with their community and partners, and explore new projects at their own initiative.

This reliable unrestricted funding can also provide organisations with “thinking time” devoid of worrying about income so they can plan their next steps. Several interviewees told us this was what they needed in the recovery period. One organisation described this as a “bridge investment” – an upfront investment in the organisation itself, rather than a single project, that allows them to transition into the recovery period, take the time to plan strategically, and follow up on new opportunities for partnership working or projects post-lockdown. Crucially, this would also allow organisations to meet community needs without using a lot of organisational capacity applying for funds. One interviewee told us that they, as a sector, know how to “support all the different, huge variety of communities and issues that are out there, it’s just whether anyone’s willing to engage and invest in us as opposed to stop-start grants”. Organisations remain concerned not only with their own recovery, but their community’s recovery, and at this pivotal moment what they need is to be trusted to use their income where they think it is necessary.

### 3. Organisational Networks

Our second round of data collection appears to confirm some of our original findings on organisational networks and resilience, as well as providing new insights on the dynamics of partnership working. Initially, we found that co-delivery strengthens the resilience of the organisations involved to a greater extent than partnerships based solely on funding bids. In prioritising genuine collaboration and joint-working, they provide more effective services directly to young people, they improve community engagement, and they create links across the sector which increases sector embeddedness. Our follow-up interviews that

took place in early July 2020 demonstrated that this continued to be the case when lockdown measures came into force. Partnerships where there was genuine co-delivery required the engagement of partners to decide how best to proceed with services and balance the original partnership agreement with the existing and emerging needs of the community. Location-based organisations had to shut, which required communication between partners to coordinate the moving of services online and deciding how the services would proceed. This highlighted different ways of working and adapting, however this did not destroy the relationships of any longstanding co-delivery partnerships. This suggests that this type of partnership is the most resilient form of partnership and fosters resilience within the organisations themselves.

Our initial findings suggested that some types of partnerships foster an imbalance of power, particularly when smaller organisations that are particularly embedded in their community are used for their reputation. Our data from BME-led and equalities-focused organisations reported a surge in interest in partnership work after the protests and advocacy of the Black Lives Matter movement. However, this interest may be superficial and exploit the credibility of these organisation without a commitment to meaningful partnership work. As one organisation put it, “for equalities type led or focussed organisations I think it can be very fickle because people just want to plaster you on their website and do a shiny statement”. This appears to support our initial findings that current ways of working can encourage superficial partnerships rather than meaningful co-delivery.

Organisations reported an increase in networks and discussions across the sector, once they had dealt with the initial Covid-19 lockdown crisis. This was aided by online working and was fuelled by the need for sector-wide collaboration and co-ordination of services in order to make their voice

cohesive, and heard, in terms of advocacy for third sector funding relief packages. We hope these informal links will continue, either as the building blocks of future service-delivery partnerships, or as ways of increasing sector embeddedness. As previously found, understanding where services fit in the wider sector and learning how other organisations engage with their community is key to the resilience of the sector.

## 4. Community Engagement

Our original findings around resilient organisations having a reciprocal dialogue to engage with the young people they serve has persisted through the initial Covid-19 lockdown crisis. In adapting their services online, many organisations were consultative, and in some cases young people actively authored or led the services themselves. This goes beyond our original interpretations of 'service user involvement', where not only are service users consulted about the provision but they "take charge of the entire agenda and conversation". This is empowering for those young people who author the services, ensures the services are needs-led, and encourages the engagement of other young people.

During the initial COVID-19 lockdown, organisations were told to "use the money around what you're doing in the community" instead of meeting strict project outcomes. Engaging with young people was prioritised for these organisations, with one interviewee telling us that their funder had said "don't worry about the targets, the main thing is that you're having some sort of communication with young people where you can". This supports our interpretation of our original round of data collection, that meaningful engagement with a community is crucial for organisational resilience.

## 5. Organisational Development

Monitoring and evaluation persisted throughout our second round of data collection as relevant to resilience. The most interesting shift during the initial weeks of the coronavirus pandemic with regards to third sector organisations was the move by funders to deprioritise project outcomes and ease reporting requirements. That organisations were given the time and capacity to focus on engaging their community rather than meeting project outcomes and satisfying reporting requirements may have mitigated some of the loss of in-person support.

Of the organisations we spoke to, 75% reported that some of their funders had relaxed their reporting requirements. They all expressed the benefits of this, particularly the capacity it freed up over the lockdown period. This supports the interpretation from our original round of data analysis that some organisations do not have the capacity to fulfil lengthy monitoring and evaluation procedures, particularly at a time of uncertainty and increasing need amongst young people. As one organisation succinctly put it, "the era of 'I've got a really clear plan that I've clearly budgeted and I can give you timelines and reporting periods and milestones', that's not really realistic right now. It's more about flexibility and adaptability". This allowed the organisations the time to adapt their services to follow government coronavirus guidelines and be able to make decisions strategically and flexibly without immediate funding pressures or having to ask permission from funders.

We previously commented that whilst over-quantified monitoring has become a “necessity” for funding, the process of reflection and improvement is undeniably positive. In most cases, organisations continued to engage with their services users and assess the effectiveness of their service without the funder-driven requirement to do so.

For example, one organisation reported that they had started a new social media page over lockdown to engage with young people, and that now “we could measure all our likes on Instagram, we had one case where somebody had joined our Instagram page, then they’d messaged us on Instagram for some more advice and information. So that’s a really small qualitative study of what difference that made”. This appears to support the finding that a resilient organisation is one that critically reflects on their service provision and their service users’ needs of their own initiative.

# Discussion

Our analyses above demonstrate that resilience is fostered by a combination of factors. The most resilient organisations are likely to be those who integrate these factors across their ways of working, and therefore benefit from the mutually reinforcing interplay between them. The relationships between metrics are what ultimately promote resilience, and not any single metric in isolation. Understanding these metrics in a holistic sense gives us a deeper insight into the barriers to resilience and how they can be addressed.

## Promoting resilience

When looking at the factors that promote resilience in a broader sense, it appears that organisational structure underpins all other metrics. An organisation that has a clear and precise mission, with a well-defined community of young people, and an appropriate model and consistent strategy to carry out this mission may be more able to operate efficiently and cohesively across all areas of its service provision. This appeared to be consistently important when organisations were forced to adapt their models and strategies for online provision during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Furthermore, an organisation with a clear structure may be more successful in identifying diverse streams of income that fulfil its charitable objectives, which can support them in adapting to meet changing needs. During the initial COVID-19 crisis in 2020, some organisations relied on their reserves to provide a financial cushion. This may support our original findings that a source of reliable funding for core costs provides capacity and flexibility to work strategically, to help organisations effectively carry out their mission.

An effective organisational structure can lay the foundation for meaningful partnership work that focuses on co-delivery. Organisations with aligned missions and complementary models may find these co-delivery partnerships are more

effective. Meaningful partnerships may increase each organisation's capacity to provide high-quality, needs led services. Equally, when working practices are integrated, the partnership may have better working dynamics and be less likely to collapse during a crisis. These partnerships can have a positive impact on the wider sector by improving links across the city and ensuring gaps in provision are identified.

In a similar way to service-delivery partnerships, sharing practice allows organisations to understand where their services fit within the context of the youth sector, filling gaps and increasing internal capacity. When organisations have these communicative networks, they can make more informed decisions, for example about organisational processes or funding applications. These communicative networks appear to be increasingly important as we head into the recovery period following the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. These informal links may be important either as the building blocks of future service-delivery partnerships, or as a way of ensuring the sector's offer is cohesive and addresses emerging needs.

If an organisation is engaged with its community of young people, it is likely that services will be more responsive and sustainable. The structure of an organisation is central to this, because without a clear mission there is no cohesive community to serve. When an organisation simply 'targets disadvantage', it becomes harder to engage with a clear and consistent base of young people. By contrast, an organisation with clarity of mission, and who it exists to serve, can more easily open a reciprocal dialogue. This process allows young people the opportunity to have agency over the services they use, leading to provision that may be rooted in community need. This was consistently important across both datasets, where after the initial COVID-19 lockdown, an emphasis on empowering young people may have led to the successful adaptation of services.

Engaging in the process of evaluation, whether internally or externally motivated, may mean service provision is more effective and responsive. Organisational structure is again central, as the processes of monitoring and evaluation need to be understood as part of an organisation's long-term strategic thinking. Resilient organisations successfully balance the need for stability with innovation, ensuring that creativity and change are not tokenistic, but developed with recognition of what works and will continue to engage young people. This stood out in our second round of data collection, where some funders relaxed reporting requirements and were flexible on project outcomes during the first COVID-19 lockdown. In most cases, organisations continued to assess the effectiveness of their service without the funder-driven requirement to do so in ways which improved with engagement with young people. Overwhelmingly, organisations were positive about the capacity they gained when not having to carry out lengthy monitoring and evaluation procedures, whilst recognising the need to balance this with critical reflection.

## Barriers to resilience

The main barrier to resilience is funding competition across the sector. This not only creates direct competition for grants and contracts, but also fosters an environment which discourages collaboration. This affects resilience across all metrics in our framework. Firstly, bidding for a greater number of potentially less relevant funds wastes capacity. Secondly, it prevents meaningful partnerships and sharing practice. Finally, it means that organisations may be limited in terms of strategic planning and commitment to projects which may weaken the overall stability of their services.

When an organisation is required to operate in a competitive environment, it uses a disproportionate amount of capacity bidding or applying for funds which could be better spent on service provision. Due to the scarcity of funds, organisations need to send out more applications, which inevitably have a lower success rate. Often this leads to an organisation bending its mission to meet funding trends that do not align with its young people's needs or its own fundamental mission. When capacity is spent applying for bids rather than providing services, engagement can be weakened, and young people's needs may be less likely to be met.

Not only may this affect engagement with the community, but also with the sector. Competition means that organisations feel discouraged from sharing ideas; they are pitted against each other despite providing different services to distinct communities. When there is no environment of sharing practice, it can have a negative impact on cohesion of the youth sector. The competitive funding environment means the building blocks for meaningful partnerships may be deprioritised. Organisations already struggle to find the capacity for relationship building, and the competitive environment is likely to exacerbate this. This might lead to isolationist working practices where opportunities for collaboration and communication are missed.

The current environment, in which funding is largely short-term and pots are small, may prevent organisations from committing to long-term projects or planning strategically. What organisations reported they need is a reliable source of unrestricted income which could be spent on core costs, to also provide continuity between projects and the flexibility to work strategically on their own initiative. Without this, organisations are likely to get stuck in a vicious cycle of finding small pots of funding rather than providing a consistent and comprehensive offer.

Ultimately, this could prevent organisations from running consistent services and maintaining consistent dialogue with young people.

Organisations reported that the funding environment looking into the recovery period beyond COVID-19 is bleak. The scarcity of larger pots of long-term funding has been inevitably exacerbated, and uncertainty around future funds means competition between organisations may be worsened. When there is an increasing demand for services, it is more important than ever that organisations work collaboratively to ensure a cohesive sector-wide offer that meets developing and emerging needs amongst young people. As we enter the recovery period, supporting organisations to work collaboratively may increase organisational and sector-wide resilience.

# Conclusion

This report has explored the resilience of third sector youth organisations in Bristol and the surrounding areas, providing an initial research overview as well as a follow up study in the aftermath of the initial COVID 19 lockdown in 2020. Our research sought to understand the factors that promote organisational resilience and gain insight into the barriers and challenges experienced by the sector in providing youth services. Through our first round of data analysis we generated a theory of resilience, which was then tested after the unprecedented COVID-19 initial lockdown. This research is uniquely positioned to comment on organisational resilience, as we have baseline insights into the nature of resilience that can be re-analysed again as we enter the recovery period.

This report has demonstrated that resilience is fostered through the mutually reinforcing interplay of a combination of factors. Our findings suggest that organisations with a clear, precise mission and well-defined community of young people, an appropriate model and a consistent strategy can operate more effectively and cohesively across all areas of their service provision. Furthermore, accessing income that provides a stable source of funding for core costs may allow organisations the time to plan strategically and build meaningful relationships with their partners and their community. Finally,

service delivery partnerships can promote more meaningful relationships, which increase capacity, create better engagement, and foster better links across city.

Understanding the interplay between these metrics gives us a deeper insight into the barriers to resilience and how they can be addressed. Our research suggests that the main barrier to resilience is competition, which hinders resilience by wasting capacity and preventing meaningful relationships across the sector. When capacity is wasted it limits organisations' flexibility, which is crucial for organisations to be responsive to emerging needs whilst still providing the stability of services that youth work requires.

These insights are important not only for youth organisations, but for Bristol's third sector as a whole. With growing demands on services, organisations must be able to assess needs to ensure their services have a lasting impact, particularly following the devastating effects of the COVID-19 crisis. The findings of this research contribute to an understanding of third sector resilience and how funders can support organisations to overcome competition and build their own resilience.



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# Appendix

## Quantitative Metrics Database Fields

### **Organisational Info:**

Year Group Established  
Income bracket  
Ward  
Number of Trustees

### **Funding:**

Restricted Income  
Unrestricted Income  
Total income/Turnover  
Restricted vs Unrestricted Income  
Total expenditure  
Total reserves  
Unrestricted reserves  
Unrestricted reserves/total expenditure as months  
Change in unrestricted reserves (2017-2018)

### **Diversity of Income:**

Traded income  
Donations  
Fundraising Events  
Charitable Activities (contracts and grants)  
Investment  
Other

### **Staff Structure:**

Number of Volunteers  
Number of Permanent Staff  
Ratio Staff: Volunteers



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

