

**GROW SOCIAL
CAPITAL**

Perspectives on voluntary sector resilience



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Grow Social Capital CIC

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1. Who is Grow Social Capital CIC?

“The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself”

Lyda Hanifan, 1916

Grow Social Capital CIC was established as a Community Interest Company in November 2020 after several months of operating as a collaboration of its four individual directors: Andy Green; Sarah Tamsin; Matt Appleby; and Russell Todd. Fuller profiles for these are available in [Appendix 1](#).

Grow Social Capital was motivated by the recognition that the same-old, same-old didn't work before and it won't work now as we emerge from the pandemic; the grip of which might be releasing but its longer-term impact is likely to be felt for some time. Our purpose is to:

Harness purpose and Social Capital to support positive personal, social and economic change, as well as respecting the contribution of stability and cohesion for creating more resilient, capable and confident communities, organisations or workplaces; to transform thinking, mindfulness and how people do things to realise their potential and create the change they want to see in the world; and to tackle the growth of 'UnSocial Capital' - the changing levels of Social Capital which are leading to growing distrust, disrespect, division and tribalism in society.

We do this by bringing together skills in changemaking in communities, business and social enterprises; share our expertise in community development and changemaking, transformative communications and developing organisational Purpose and Social Capital. This serves to create new narratives for harnessing the positive potential of and Purposefulness and Social Capital to enable communities, teams or organizations to realise greater togetherness, be more resilient and create the 'new normals' they want post-pandemic.

2. Background

“I will survive”

Gloria Gaynor, 1978

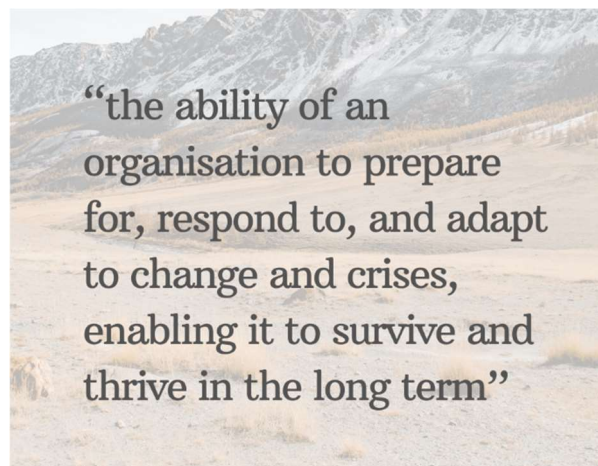
Early in 2021 Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) identified that:

“building resilience is going to be vital for organisations in the context of ongoing change, uncertainty and crisis. Whilst resilience has been an issue for Welsh charities for a number of years, this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, and the subsequent recession.”

It commissioned research to:

- set out the issues
- contribute to a helpful definition of resilience, which has consensus amongst the sector,
- set out what we know from existing evidence of what does and doesn't work in relation to building resilience
- generate peer to peer discussions on what it means for organisations in Wales, and
- to develop recommendations for who needs to do what now to build sector's resilience.

The definition of resilience that was to be put to the voluntary sector in Wales was:



Grow Social Capital CIC successfully tendered for this work and undertook a combination of desk research and stakeholder engagement. The specific methods employed are outlined below.

2.1. Origins of the definition

WCVA's working definition of resilience was developed by a working group following consultation with staff from across the organisation.

2.2. Engagement with the definition

Grow Social Capital stressed that the definition was not being presented to the sector as a *fait accompli* and all focus group participants and interviewees were presented with the definition in advance of their contributions to the enquiry in order that they had time to reflect on the definition and consider their positions.

Furthermore, participants were all invited to put forward any alternative definitions that their organisations or sub-sectors worked to. None did this, though a significant minority stated that specific elements of resilience figured more prominently in their organisational missions than others, and/or that these significantly influenced the existence and configuration of specific services and activities. These instances were all from participants who work with young people or in the mental health sector.

Participants in each of the principal methodologies – survey, focus groups and interviews – were offered the opportunity to express their views on definition. In the latter pair, this was not intended as a simplistic semantic cosmetic exercise, rather it helped surface subjective meaning, perspectives and interpretations that helped shape the subsequent semi-structured conversations in both methods.

Towards the end of each of principal methodologies participants were invited to suggest amendments or additions to the WCVA definition. There was a range of perspectives here: from participants for whom the conversation had re-enforced their initial convictions and opinions; a small number who came to an alternative position; while a small number expressed a desire for further time to ponder things because they either remained unsure about resilience, or that their initially held position had now given way to less certainty due to the multi-faceted, and/or conceptual and/or complex nature of the conversations.

2.3. Timing of the enquiry

With the exception of a handful of individuals there was a broad consensus that now was an opportune time to be considering notions of resilience and the factors that contribute to it. Only one participant in the entire enquiry was able to identify an existing concept of resilience which their organisation worked to and that was a definition that posited resilience as a limiting, unambitious, oppressive state to aim for (S10W).

Frustration was expressed by a significant minority of participants because, though a definition for and within the sector is useful, they either expected it to fall on deaf ears within the statutory sector and government; or, where there was a desire on the part of the statutory sector to engage with the voluntary sector on resilience, they were disappointed it had taken the enormous impact of a global pandemic for it to be finally attentive.

We were mindful of the need to avoid over-engagement and so-called ‘consultation fatigue’, and of other recent/current enquiries that touch, to a greater or lesser degree, on resilience, notably the Promo Cymru enquiry into digital literacy during the pandemic and the Lloyds Bank Foundation enquiry into organisational resilience¹.

¹ The definition that Lloyds Bank Foundation used can be found here: <https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/develop/transforming-and-strengthening-services/organisational-resilience>

It should also be noted that although the enquiry's fieldwork took place towards the very end of social distancing requirements in Wales, the pandemic's impact on voluntary organisations shaped the extent and ability to which people could get involved in the enquiry. This proved a double-edged sword.

Some participants were involved with organisations that were planning their return to 'normal' forms of service delivery, and focused on aspects of this related directly to the WCVA definition of resilience; while several stated that their organisations were undertaking their own strategic reviews and/or strategic planning exercises so much of the questions the enquiry posed of them, resonated with ones they were asking themselves. The enquiry complemented, re-enforced or continued to challenge their present thinking and welcomed this.

There were others, however, for whom the enquiry came at the end of an extremely stressful period, both professionally and personally. Many referred to their own personal and familial health problems with which they have had to grapple; under-staffing and heavy workloads; and short-term uncertainty about their own personal and organisational futures. In discussing resilience the enquiry thus risked dwelling on *specific* aspects of people's working and personal lives that were undermining morale.

We stressed that people could leave at any point in any of the methods and engage with us in their own ways if they wished (e.g., short phone or Zoom calls, or email correspondence). We fully respected, and continue to do so, people's right to not want to engage.

3. Our methods

Her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly

Simone de Beauvoir, 1949

Our methodology comprised several elements:

- literature review
- online survey
- focus groups
- validation through consultation exercise
- randomised coffee trials
- interviews

3.1. Literature review

This comprised three elements:

- Academic literature
- ‘Grey literature’ that has emerged in recent years from civil society
- Sources such as newspapers, online blogs, personal reflections

We prioritised literature on resilience based on or informed by a Welsh context but did not confine ourselves to only this context and we ‘visited’ other jurisdictions too. We are indebted to Dr Eva Elliott and Dr Jan Huyton for their input to the literature review.

This can be found in [section 6](#).

3.2. Online survey

The survey, hosted by Doopoll, ran for seven weeks. It could be completed from one or more perspectives: as a worker in the voluntary sector in Wales; as a trustee; or as a volunteer. This was in recognition that many people in the voluntary sector wear multiple hats: they are a trustee of a charity, as well as working in the sector; they volunteer in a ‘front of house’ capacity for one organisation while considering strategic and legal obligations as a trustee of another. We felt it important to offer individuals the opportunity to comment from multiple perspectives rather than choose one or other.

The survey could be filled in anonymously or people could supply a name and contact details for follow up queries and to be nominated for a Randomised Coffee Trial.

3.3. Focus groups

A programme of focus groups was held in July. Advertised on Eventbrite for people to self-register, we drew on a small team of facilitators drawn from the voluntary sector in Wales to facilitate them (see [Appendix 2](#)). In addition, to our ‘headline’ programme the facilitators were encouraged to convene groups from among their own networks.

Reflecting the scientific, media and political consensus that the pandemic disproportionately impacted upon people from ethnic minority communities and people with disabilities (IPPR, 2020; Saltus, 2020, Murray, 2020b, 2020c) in agreement with WCVA we decided to focus on these two communities of interest with focus groups dedicated to exploring perceptions and experiences of resilience through these 'lenses'.

To be clear: focus groups were open to anyone to attend with a connection to the voluntary sector; people with disabilities or from ethnic minority communities were not restricted to those sessions looking at resilience through the lenses of disability and ethnicity.

3.4. Validation Through Consultation (VTC) exercise

A small but critical step in the enquiry was a VTC exercise that was open to anyone who had participated in the enquiry via any of the above methods. Initially scheduled to be held on 18 August, it was postponed due to illness to 16 September.

In essence, the VTC workshop provides for the triangulation of views and comments between ourselves, individuals who made them, and the broader group of participants who will have been exposed to only a very small proportion of the views of others.

We tested with participants whether what we had concluded from their comments resonated with them; was proportionate in terms of tone and strength of feeling with what had been said; had omitted or under-played anything; and to gain the consent of some of the participants to proceed to finalising our findings ahead of final presentation to WCVA and the wider sector.

3.5. Randomised Coffee Trials

In response to the part of the brief WCVA set us – to generate peer to peer discussions on what resilience means for organisations in Wales – we invited all participants in the enquiry, i.e., those who registered for a focus groups (irrespective of whether they attended or not); those who completed the survey; interviewees; to be paired with another participant to discuss online or in person, should they mutually feel comfortable to do so, aspects of organisational resilience. This is a 'Randomised Coffee Trial' and is a useful but informal way of sharing knowledge and learning, networking and encouraging reflection.

We mandated very little of the conversations, other than to inform those who agreed to take part that we would ask them subsequent to their conversation what they:

- have learned from the other person
- have learned about themselves and/or their organisation
- will try to implement for themselves and/or their organisation

3.6. Interviews

Six interviews were held during the inquiry and were with people who wanted to attend a focus group but were unable to do so due to unavailability, diary clashes or late cancellations²; were nominated by respondents; got in touch with us directly. They were conducted by either Grow Social Capital or our recruited facilitators.

3.7. Key to participants

Focus group coding

Each focus group was coded with either a number (1, 2, 3 etc) or either D or E to reflect its focus on Disability and Ethnicity. Each participant in a focus group was allocated a letter to. For instance:

FGDC = the disability focus group, participant C

FG3A = focus group #3, participant A

FGEB = the ethnicity focus group, participant B

FG1D = focus group #1, participant D

Survey coding

Each participant in the survey is coded too with a number and letter corresponding to the three categories of survey respondent: worker, volunteer, trustee. For instance:

S3T = respondent #3, trustee survey

S17W = respondent #17, worker survey

S6V = respondent #6, volunteer survey

Interviewee coding

IW1 = worker who was interviewed #1

IT3 = trustee who was interviewed #3

RCT coding

RCT1 = Random Coffee Trial participant #1

Validation Through Consultation coding

Each participant in the VTC workshop has been allocated a number e.g.:

VTC2 = participant #2 in the VTC workshop

VTC4 = participant #4 in the VTC workshop

² The focus groups coincided with a 'spike' in enforced self-isolation of school pupils and their resultant homeschooling which prevented some people from attending their preferred focus groups. Some participants were interviewed instead if they could not make an alternative focus group.

3.8. Geography of respondents

[Appendix 3](#) shows the geographical spread from across Wales that respondents' organisations operate in.

3.9. Welsh language

Everyone was offered the opportunity to contribute in Welsh or English, with other community languages available on request.

Where quotes are included in the report from participants that contributed through the medium of Welsh these are included in Welsh with an English translation for non-Welsh speakers.

Grow Social Capital welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English.

4. Outputs

There are two principal outputs from the enquiry:

- this report
 - complemented by online/digital media, including [this podcast](#)
- a Resilience Ideas Bank (see [Appendix 5](#))

4.1. Report

This report has been written by Grow Social Capital, with Russell Todd taking the lead, and contributions from others at Grow Social Capital, as well as Dr Eva Elliott and the facilitators.

It is founded on principles of ‘minessence’ i.e., the ability to translate complex ideas into realizable, bite-size chunks. We hope they highlight a new narrative around resilience.

Thus, rather than make final recommendations we have drafted a manifesto of key points raised in the course of this enquiry that can help WCVA refine the existing definition of resilience. We make no excuse for presenting this as a *draft* manifesto. The scope of the enquiry has not been sufficiently broad to claim it is representative, nor that our findings have a broad democratic legitimacy. As was pointed in the enquiry out recurrently by participants, the concept of resilience (howsoever defined) is a term with political connotations and implications, for instance in its connection with availability of resources to enhance resilience; the distribution of power in relationships (whether between individuals, organisations, institutions or the state); cultural interpretations; the role of the state in militating against efforts to boost resilience, or acquiescing to market forces that have similar effect

In keeping with Northrop and Mahony’s (2019) plea to align political literacy and education with community and grassroots activism – with which every single participant in this enquiry was involved during the pandemic – we at Grow Social Capital think there *is* a mandate for continuing to involve the sector, formal and less formal, in examining, refining and re-shaping the concept of resilience; not least because there is a consensus that adaptability is a key element of resilience, and so the concept of resilience is unlikely to remain static.

In addition, we believe there is a mandate in for the work to initiate forms of collective action around the concept of resilience; the strongest theme to emerge is the need for the sector to work *collaboratively* around the concept of resilience. But if it is unlikely to remain static, then neither is its contested nature likely to cease either, with some wanting to collectively and collaboratively act around resilience, while others may wish to undertake collective forms of resistance, rejecting the concept of resilience altogether.

4.2. Resilience IdeasBank

We have used this enquiry to lay the foundations for the Resilience IdeasBank, the idea of which is to establish a knowledge-based resource comprising what works and what doesn’t in relation to resilience. We believe there is merit in it being developed by its own ‘savers’ i.e., those who deposit and make withdrawals of ideas and social capital. WCVA’s Resilience Officer might find it a useful

resource to develop with the sector. As one participant in our validation through consultation workshop said:

This is something I'm really keen on hearing more about. Not just that we can learn from each other [but] choose who we learn from and about what. That we can potentially take ownership of our learning is exciting

VTC4

Grow Social Capital's Andy Green and Caroline Shaw have led on the development of the IdeasBank.

5. Literature review

“The human crisis is always a crisis of understanding: what we genuinely understand we can do”

Raymond Williams, 1958

5.1. Resilience in literature – an overview

Harrison observes the concept of resilience ‘saturating’ policy strategies of local and national government, think tanks and funding bodies (2012, in Garrat et al, 2021) and is likely to be recognised by those working in and connected to the voluntary sector and wider civil society in Wales.

It will probably come as little surprise that across the literature there is no single, overriding definition of resilience. Use and application of the term has proliferated greatly in post-devolution UK civil society and the political-economy lexicon.

One can find many different domains in which resilience is a feature: emotional resilience; educational resilience; financial resilience; environmental resilience. It has been deployed by successive UK governments since Blair’s administration as characteristic of individuals or communities (Donoghue and Edmiston, 2020), suggesting a versatility of the term to some, or an imprecision and over-malleability to others.

Neither is there a consensus about what creates resilience in each of these contexts, although there is consensus around the importance of some *specific* contributing factors. It is important also to stress that these do not themselves *in isolation* bring about resilience. More recently, there is an emerging view that resilience is less an outcome i.e., a state of being that one (be they an individual, an organisation, a sector) achieves or self-actualises. Rather it is a process of adaptation, recovery and willingness to learn from hitherto unknown experiences and environments.

However it has also been used to talk about the strength to cope with ongoing pressures and adversity e.g., ongoing poverty, austerity – i.e., coping with the conditions that could be thought of as being created by the state.

This overview of ways in which resilience is viewed in Dagdeviren et al (2016, p.3) is quite useful:

- “(a) going back to the initial state after some shock, or*
- (b) absorbing the disturbance and remaining in the same state, or*
- (c) successfully adapting to the adversity and achieving a different state, or*
- (d) turning shocks into opportunity and transforming oneself to a better state?”*

Generally speaking in the literature, those experiences that are deemed to shape resilience tend to be framed as challenges or forms of adversity; actual or potential harmful negatives on a state of wellbeing, equilibrium, direction of travel or longstanding sense of normalcy.

Over the last twenty years or so, there is also a visible shift from simplistic constructs of low and high resilience to a more nuanced understanding of resilience as changeable, but not in terms of ‘quantities’ of resilience, more in terms of ability to adapt to that which is imposing change.

Resilience has been variously defined as a trait, process or outcome (Harrop et al, 2013). Where the term is used it tends to infer that a positive adaptation has occurred in response to risk. The element of risk leads us to consider what protective factors might be employed to mitigate risk and protective factors are commonly identified at the individual level, the family level and the community level (ibid.). As Boost and Meier point out:

“process- and resource-related concept, as resilient practices emerge during crises by activating and mobilising latent social, cultural, or economic resources”

(2017, 372)

There is an emerging strand of thought that conceives of resilience in the face of change in a more holistic sense. In addition to the potentially harmful impacts, change also offers opportunities: to collaborate, to innovate, to diversify, to consolidate, to demonstrate values and worth, to deepen purpose, to strengthen resolve, and so on.

Policy ‘saturation’ may reflect the extent to which notions of resilience have become politically orthodox. There are some who challenge, even reject, resilience for its acquiescence to capitalist accumulation, gentrification, social displacement and dispossession, and continued ecological degradation. Critiques of resilience have moved beyond conceiving it, in boxing parlance, as the ability to absorb punches but to avoid them from landing at all. Even more radical, structural critiques of resilience posit whether it should be possible to *resist* getting in the ring at all, and draw attention to the role of the state in helping to ‘rig’ the scoring system against communities.

A note of caution is warranted here that notions of ‘disruption’ must not be seen automatically as a *negative*. Where a *status quo* is unrepresentative, non-inclusive and exclusionary then efforts to change this from within, or without, can be progressively disruptive. For instance, we are mindful of the current efforts in the arts sector to reappraise and reconfigure the cultural contract following the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 and the ongoing concerns that the arts remains disproportionately white.

5.2. Resilience as an individual trait

Over time too there is a noticeable shift in tone and language. In the realm of health and wellbeing services there has been a long and consistent focus on, and application of the term to, individuals; or within social services to the family unit. Successive UK governments since Blair’s administration have portrayed resilience as a characteristic of individuals or communities (Donoghue and Edmiston, 2020).

For instance, Mind (2013) defines resilience as “Resilience is the capacity of people to confront and cope with life’s challenges; to maintain their wellbeing in the face of adversity.” (p.1). It quotes several focus group participants appear to equate resilience with individual fortitude, inner-strength and a ‘getting through’ in the face of adversity (ibid.).

Meanwhile, The Young Foundation (Russell et al, 2010) defines resilience as an “ability to bounce back from the challenges in life” (p.7) in a report for an English county’s family board.

Both display the tendency in resilience literature circa 2010 of risking the pathologizing of individuals and communities for their supposed lack of resilience, i.e., their inability to cope successfully with challenges because of perceived deficiencies and weaknesses. This deficit-focus appears to lead in some literature at this time to a simplistic assumption: that people are overwhelmed by poverty, rather than displaying positive and adaptive behaviours.

However, it should also be added that the turn to resilience was also welcomed as an alternative to deficit models of understanding communities. Focusing on positive attributes in terms of how people do manage in the context of adversity (Harrison 2012, in Garrat et al, 2021); how it focuses on their agentic capabilities and a counterbalance to vulnerability (Garrett et al 2021); and rather than seeing people who experience hardship as passive victims, they can be viewed as resourceful with enhanced agency (Dagdeviren et al, 2016). Within this strand of literature is a recognition that communities' resilience can be deepened through forms of collective action and collaboration. Nevertheless, a focus on agency – individual or collective – alone ignores the relevance of structure (ibid.).

Mind suggests too that resilience can be scaled up to the community level through aggregating the sum total of individuals' resilience, and that the former is built inevitably working with ever greater numbers of individuals on their own resilience. There is a risk that this overlooks inequalities and intersectionality within communities (however defined) and that resilience is distributed in some equitable manner.

There is a noticeable trend of conflating a lack of resilience with disadvantage, i.e., those areas most lacking resilience are those of greater levels of socio-economic disadvantage.; that there is some proportional relationship between reducing disadvantage and thus increasing resilience. Secondly, that resilience is something that can be 'topped up' and increased in quantity or volume, which risks inferring that there is an optimum level of resilience to which to strive.

There is also criticism in relation to the negative impacts of resilient behaviours. For instance, people cutting back on food is an adaptive response to managing cuts to their income but looking at this through a 'resilience lens' may overlook or dilute the negative consequences of such an adaptation (see Harrison, 2012). The risk here is that those with less capacity to adapt or innovate in the face of shocks are seen as less resilient. Ignoring the wider structural factors affecting people's lives, and/or by accepting unquestioningly an orthodox of individual resilience, is to potentially re-enforce 'survival of the fittest' mantras.

5.3. Conceptions of collective resilience

Asset based approaches i.e., those that aim to build on the networks, relationships, facilities and resources that communities possess or have access to, can be seen as staple among many voluntary and community sector organisations and forms of action (Elliott et al, 2021; BCT, 2020). Despite, the tendency to see resilience as an individual trait, Mind (2013) and The Young Foundation (Russell et al, 2010) both recognise the value of strong social networks in building trust between people, the merit of building on the assets that communities have, and the need for community-led resilience.

As Elliott et al (2012) note there is a wealth of literature conceiving of community strengthening via organising as a way of building social capital. The extent to which these *merely* build resilience and fall short of engaging in more concerted resistance in the face of state and wider inequalities is noted (and returned to below).

Demonstrating this ‘acceptance’ of resilience at the expense of more resistant positions, both Mind and The Young Foundation proscribe a range of managerial approaches to building resilience such as ‘resilience training’, a comprehensive information tool listing resilience activities, or ‘resilience boosting’ workshops for school pupils, within a broader emphasis on the need for services to be re-configured to focus more efficiently and cost-effectively on those most ‘chaotic’, most vulnerable or similarly potentially-pejorative terms; betraying the risk in narratives of individual resilience of ‘victim blaming’ (Elliott et al, 2012)

In addition, it is a simplistic, possibly conceited, approach that assumes that pursuit of design-perfected services can ‘top-up’ resilience, or release latent and hitherto unseen reserves of it. Furthermore, the growth in understanding of the importance of co-production in service design and delivery is challenging the traditions of services that ‘do to’ in favour of services that ‘do with’; it is a position that can be seen as both resilience-building in itself as well as being an adaptive response to external forces such as declining budgets, increasing demand, or existential in the form of a pandemic. In this respect, there are organisational concepts of resilience in literature that focuses on the process of change and its impact on organisations (see Diaz, 2020).

Clark and Oxley (2020) conclude that a messy nexus of relationships between the following five themes promote resilience, rather than any single factor in isolation:

- organisational structure
- funding
- organisational networks
- community engagement
- monitoring and evaluation

The Bevan Foundation (2019) provides an excellent summary of literature around the concept of ‘economic resilience’ citing the likes of New Economics Foundation, Locality and Friends Provident Foundation. It:

“is useful for understanding the structural economic make-up of a place in relation to its past, present and future. It can help distinguish which actions and developments are more likely to reduce a place’s vulnerability, support recovery, engender reorientation when necessary and recover quickly and positively when change happens, as it inevitably does”

(p.19)

This more longitudinal perspective of place also lends itself to a more nuanced appreciation of the impact of slow, long-term change (i.e., to an economy or society), rather than confine the concept of resilience, howsoever defined, as something that is only pertinent to sudden, temporal shocks (see also Diaz, 2020).

5.4. Resilience as control

The conception of resilience as the ability to adapt and to change, rather than merely absorb or withstand, is now well-established. More recently this is complemented by an additional element: control.

The idea of being in control is increasingly seen as central to individual, community and system level resilience. With regard to systems it is not just about absorbing, adapting, anticipating (more of which

below) – but also retaining the autonomy and control over remit and primary objectives (WHO, 2020). Elsewhere, the National Lottery Community Fund (2018) suggests that organisational resilience is shaped by three factors; organisations have:

- a clear understanding of their purpose
- an operating model that sustainably supports their activities
- the financial flexibility and resources to achieve their goals

It might be reasonable to add *values* to the list of things over which control is retained, in light of Elliott et al's (2021) observations that some community anchor organisations have deepened their purpose and mission since leaving Communities First, a programme that, from the outside might be expected to be benevolent to such organisations. They also identified instances where requirements or conditions of certain funds/funders that might have challenged values or purpose were rejected irrespective of likely success of application.

Noakes (2020) too posits that control and autonomy, in his case in counter-response to state-enabled uneven development that displaces people (often in a racializing manner), are key elements of not only resilient communities but resistant (more below). Therefore it is not just control and autonomy in the face of the market, but also government, other facets of the state, and elsewhere within the voluntary sector.

5.5. Resilience as foresight

For the Bevan Foundation, the economic resilience concept can help change the developmental trajectory an area follows, meaning that it offers hope of escaping the limiting confines of an economic past (e.g., low-wage, insecure work, extractive 'leaky' economies). Inherent in this is the ability to *anticipate how* change will impact. There is a growing appreciation of strategic efforts to predict these impacts via futures work; indeed, WCVA has been at the vanguard of this in Wales via its recent [Better Futures Wales](#) project³.

In locating the concept of resilience within a voluntary sector organisational context, Chapman (2017) also emphasises 'foresight' as a key element, defined as:

“the organisation’s capability as a whole to be able to anticipate change and develop strategic plans to accommodate or exploit opportunities arising from change”

(p.11)

It might be useful to point out that terms such as 'futures', 'foresight' and anticipation should not be equated with having a crystal ball. As Diaz (2020) points out “there are no proven recipes in dealing with a completely unknown situation” (p. 3). Instead, techniques that encourage reflexivity, i.e., the dual process of being attentive to one's own situatedness in a given process (e.g., research, economic, social interaction, etc.) as well as how it in turn has an effect on oneself (Gilgun, 2008 in Probst, 2015), generate situational responses that need to be constantly assessed. These can be enhanced through the promotion of participation, shared critical self-reflection, or continuous action research. In this way the organisation strives to make sense of what is going on (ibid); deliberation in this way might

³ A helpful introduction to futures theory is available in this podcast with School of International Futures: <https://soundcloud.com/wcvacymru/dyfodol-gwell-cymru-cyflwyno-rhagwelediad-better-futures-wales-intro-foresight>.

lend itself too to organisations understanding the slower, more corrosive forms of change that Diaz refers to (2020).

We would argue that this focus on reflexivity is helpful for understanding resilience as a process over which a degree of control and self-determination is retained; while the focus on participation and sharing amplifies the value of collective experience within the concept of resilience as a process.

Chapman (2017) concludes that good governance is more important to concepts of voluntary sector resilience than money and raising income (which is not to say that these are *unimportant*). A regard for good governance is not new in the voluntary sector, but the extent to which it seen as a core component of resilience might be in some quarters, both within the sector and outside it.

5.6. Resilience as innovation

As Harrop et al (2013) point out, recent conceptions of resilience have begun to embrace innovation as a factor in promoting resilience in communities and, in particular, organisations. In respect of the pandemic Diaz observes pressures in the not-for-profit and NGO sector to emphasise ‘business as usual’ in order to maintain efficiency in order not to lose status and to continue displaying to funders, patrons, peers and partners what Lewis describes a ‘culture of action’ (2014, in Diaz, 2020). This results in some organisations striving, even rushing, to innovate or implement change in order, “to prove their supposed ability to continue their operation” (Diaz, 2020, p.1).

One of the first countries to experience the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic was Italy, particularly its northern regions and a study of the pandemic response of Snodi Solidali in Turin (Caruso et al, 2020) observed that the city was able to harness and activate existing networks through their existing social inclusion plan where there had been significant investment in voluntary sector partners and networks. The response, much like what we have seen in Welsh communities, was very dependent on volunteers, the resource which uniquely sets the voluntary sector apart from other sectors, and which is cited as a factor in promoting resilience (ibid.).

The authors of the Turin study however raise concerns whether the systems in place to cope with the immediate emergencies are transformable in the long term to deal with the ongoing social and economic consequences of the pandemic:

It is very likely that the fragilities highlighted in the acute phase will become structural in the months to come. An organizational system that is able to last over time cannot be based exclusively on the voluntary mobilization of civil society

(Caruso et al, 2020, p 569.)

In keeping with Diaz’s (2020) appraisal of the pandemic this cognisance of longer-term vulnerabilities might stimulate pressures, internal or external in origin, to innovate solutions; which certain conceptions of resilience will re-enforce and encourage given the increasing view that adaptation is a facet of resilience. But Diaz cautions that while organisations’ purpose and impact might have been re-enforced early in the pandemic through their responses to need – for instance, the distribution of mutual aid food parcels – this (renewed) sense of purpose must not be conflated with an assumption that new realities are fixed and that innovation is complete; that innovation in one domain of an organisation does not affect other domains (like a domino effect); and that the impacts of and responses to this “disaster in slow motion” (ibid., p.2) are felt collectively, but differently in individual cases.

A case in point is the agreement of several funders to be flexible on reporting requirements that Clark and Oxley (2020) observed having a positive impact on the opportunity for reflective thinking and learning in youth organisations in Bristol, and which was a factor in strengthening resilience during the pandemic.

This experience serves to re-enforce the belief that unrestricted funds are necessary for enabling voluntary organisations to undertake the capacity building/thinking time to be adaptable, both in the short-term in dealing with risks and negative forces, as well as, as Diaz encourages, the longer term. Not all voluntary sector organisations have access to these funds however (Patel et al, 2021). By Diaz's logic, such funds would allow organisations the space to decide *not* to adapt too, should they consider that to be the appropriate course of action, rather than conform to received wisdoms of 'innovating out of adversity'. Indeed, resilience as the retention of control and autonomy potentially offers, at least superficially, a conservative, risk-averse counter-strategy to innovation.

We are reminded here of personal correspondence with a community-owned co-operative in the north of Wales that, thanks to numerous crisis payments to businesses during 2020, is sitting on a bank balance eight times greater than it has been at any point in the previous decade. Though, as has been pointed out, the financial windfall does not on its own herald greater resilience should it, for instance, lose sight of a culture of sound governance; or it inappropriately or recklessly innovates; or it divests itself of partnerships and collaborations in which it previously valued; or weakens collective strength by abandoning the wider community of practice within which it operates.

On this point there is very recent pandemic-informed literature that notes the potentially harmful culture of competitive funding which pits organisations against each other rather than encouraging working in co-operation⁴ (Clark and Oxley, 2020; Caruso et al, 2020); though the observation that cultures of competitive funding can militate against greater honesty and peer support within the sector (Clarke, 2018).

Caruso et al (2020) also express a note of caution that the ability to mobilise cohorts of volunteers quickly and responsively in an emergency, heralded as an indication and virtue of resilience, is vulnerable to exploitation by a retreating state in the short-term, and quickly exhaustible. An inescapable fact of the pandemic response was that many non-key workers were furloughed, i.e., paid up to 80% of their salaries to, in effect, not work thus helping to furnish this 'reserve' of voluntary effort.

The pandemic also saw the concept of Universal Basic Income⁵ (UBI) creep into mainstream media and political consciousness to such an extent that in the 2021 Senedd and Holyrood elections several parties made manifesto pledges varying from trialling UBI, implementing it unilaterally, or implementing it for particular cohorts.

In addition, the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner in Wales is undertaking at the time of writing a feasibility study into the ability of Wales to implement not only UBI but a shorter working week⁶, (OFGC, 2020b), having already recommended *pre-pandemic* that they receive serious policy consideration (OFGC, 2020a). The impact of guaranteeing people a monthly income to secure basic

⁴ The process in several areas of Wales in which Communities First legacy monies were distributed conformed to a very overt competitive bidding process pitching third sector organisations in opposition with one another. The guidance on these monies stated that they were intended to "[preserve] the most effective aspects of the former Communities First Programme which support the development of resilient communities" (Welsh Government, 2018b, p. 2)

⁵ Also known as a minimum income guarantee.

⁶ Also known as a four day week

needs as a permanent earnings floor no one could fall beneath (Santens, 2017) and giving those of a working age a minimum seven hours a week back...sounds a lot like being furloughed; and we had a glimpse behind the curtain of what *that* looked like for citizen action.

However, for all the reserve of volunteers who may be waiting in the wings, there remains obligations on the organisations that comprise the voluntary sector in respect of financial security and funding; governance; liabilities (including property); mission and strategy; partnership and network building; community engagement and accountability; and more. And, as already pointed out, Diaz (2020) notes that pressure to innovate to appease or please others in one domain, can lead to requirements to innovate in others.

Finally, there is also the rather prosaic observation that although mutual aid efforts undoubtedly flourished during the pandemic, the suggestion that these were ‘innovative’ responses (IWA, 2021) is somewhat neglectful of a past in Wales, and working class communities across the UK, that had at their heart a “live dynamic of voluntary mutual aid” (Hazell, 1950, in Burge, 2012) meeting the challenges of economic slump before the second world war as well as the hardships that the 1939-45 conflict brought.

A few years earlier Hazell argued that the transition to peacetime provided the co-operative movement with the opportunity that “may never come our way again” to be placed by government at the heart of economic and social planning (1942, in *ibid.*). Though wartime metaphors might be considered crass, the social and economic disruption caused by the pandemic, both negative and positive – for instance, the rekindling of community spirit and the massive increase in awareness of and engagement with opportunities to volunteer⁷ (IWA, 2021) – suggests a parallel in contemporary opportunities with those Hazell saw to organise co-operatively and build co-operative institutions serving communities.

5.7. Resilience and diversity

With respect to the pandemic there is a broad scientific, media and political consensus that across the UK the pandemic disproportionately impacted upon people from ethnic minority communities, older people, disabled people, people with underlying health issues (e.g. cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disease), poor and disenfranchised people (see Murray, 2020b; 2020c; Saltus, 2020).

It is important to stress that ‘impacted’ is a multi-faceted term with complex intersections. It is far beyond the scope of this enquiry to explore these intersections, suffice to note that some groups were disproportionately at risk of catching and dying from Covid-19 than others and that gender, housing conditions and employment were some of the aggravating factors in this. But beyond the ‘headline’ *clinical* dimension of ‘impacted’ is the much longer-term, still-emerging effect of the pandemic on groups in terms of income, long term health and management of chronic conditions, employment, community cohesion, and more.

With respect to black and ethnic minority communities, Patel et al (2021 for the Institute for Public Policy Research) note that *within* this broad grouping there are further inequalities.

It is therefore necessary to consider the particular characteristics of people and places in assessing resilient processes and outcomes (Logan and Guikema, 2020); as well as a need to be open to

⁷ At the start of lockdown at the end of March 2020 views of the Volunteering Wales website jumped from the usual 2-3,000 a day to nearly 69,000.

competing and contesting definitions of resilience among different groups, and why they so define (Garratt et al, 2016). There is a danger that hegemonic and privileged positions dictate definitions of resilience as well as strategies to address it.

This is what Garrat et al (2021) observe in London and Greater Manchester where more resistant and oppositional positions to austerity – thus rejecting notions of resilience – have been ostracised locally. In an ethnically diverse borough, such as Newham, this can be observed as having a racial, and racist, dimension and impact (ibid.). Indeed, there are public strategies that conceive community cohesion as in itself an *obstacle* to resilience (ibid.).

It is salient to this enquiry to note that Murray (2020a) observed that 90% of BAME micro and small organisations surveyed at the start of the pandemic expected to close if the crisis were to continue beyond three months beyond the first UK lockdown that commenced on 27 March 2020.

Thus the experience of organisations in, and representing the interests of, the ethnically-diverse communities of Wales and their view on the concept of resilience are a key constituency in this enquiry⁸, as they have been in the likes of Clark and Oxley (2020).

5.8. Resilience as orthodoxy

Garrat et al (2021) note that the extent to which resilience has formed an orthodoxy in policy has served to:

- re-enforce concepts of individualism
- transfers responsibilities to communities without devolving the power and resources to adequately tackle capitalist social relations
- ignore these wider structural relations, processes, and forces

Brill et al (2015) note how economic policy in Wales displays similar orthodox tendencies, demonstrated by how little traction the radical elements of deep place and foundational economic thinking (e.g., Adamson and Lang, 2014) have had in Welsh policy circles; or at least *had* pre-pandemic. For them a group-think exists about “economic problem *definitions* as much as solutions” (ibid., p.10, emphasis added).

If there is there an assumption in the voluntary sector in Wales that the state can benevolently provide or bestow resilience, then the Talwrn network (2017) provides a sober reminder of the limited power of the state in this regard:

“While resilient communities can be supported or undermined by government action they can neither be created nor destroyed (in democratic states) by Government: critical elements in a resilient community are the product of citizen action or of the state and citizens working together”

(Talwrn, 2017)

⁸ Note that this enquiry does not confine community cohesion to ethnically-diverse communities in the same way that some of the literature cited here does. Cohesion among people of different faiths, class and socio-economic status, affluence, linguistic preference and ability, national identity, sexuality, and gender – and their intersection – is a far more nuanced understanding of cohesion and one we are striving to achieve. But given the specific racial context of the Newham experience ethnic diversity is a key dimension to the debate.

While Garrat et al (2021) provide, as already pointed out, an insight in to how the state can use narratives around resilience to regulate, marginalise or exclude voluntary sector and citizen action; racialize social policy; and develop “a symbolic power” (ibid., 47) that insulates it from scrutiny and establishing policies as unarguable orthodoxies.

This ‘immunity from critique’ is not only stultifying of policy formation but can more perniciously serve to enable those interests at the root of inequality. In short, a focus on building resilience is seen as actually counter-productive in developing solidarities and forms of collective opposition to the challenges that communities face. MacKinnon and Derickson (2012, in ibid.) argue capitalism relies on concepts of resilience: that reinvention and adaptation – framed often as virtues of resilience – serve merely to acquiesce to and accommodate the demands of capital accumulation in an increasingly globalized economy, and from propping up capitalism under the weight of its inherent contradictions.

In this sense the notion of resilience as ‘managing’ or ‘getting by’ begins to look not only futile, but ultimately self-harming. Alternative strategies – very much lying outside the orthodox and mainstream – that eschew resilience in favour of *resistance* can be found that seek to collectively harness the resources and capacities of local populations.

But, as observed in Newham, these efforts at resistance and defiance can end up end up being framed as:

“less as a failure of council policy and more as a measure to curb the influence of the third sector. ‘Professionals’ in this borough had come to be represented as retarding the resilience of residents.

(Garrat, et al, 2021, p.48)

More perniciously, Garrat et al (2021) can see in Newham examples of how those organisations that have opted for more resistant stances to austerity have been ostracised locally. In these ways, resistance is seen as a way of undermining local coalitions for collective resilience, but in reality merely bolster local state acquiescence to, or even enabling of, capital accumulation.

Notwithstanding the huge health, social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has revealed how effective an organically mobilised citizen effort can be (see also Blanuet, 2021). Personal correspondence during the pandemic with a community development worker employed by a west Wales town council highlighted the relevance of scale in these efforts, as well as blurring sectoral boundaries. Where larger, national charities retracted their operations and furloughed staff, smaller community groups and networks mobilised and were supported by those elements of the statutory and public sector not prioritised on or re-deployed to address the pandemic response at a more national and/or strategic level (personal correspondence, 2020). Additional examples could be witnessed during the first wave of the pandemic in communities as diverse as inner-city Bristol, a north Wales social housing estate, suburban Cardiff, and Manitoba in Canada (see Clark and Oxley, 2020; The Community Development Podcast, 2020a; 2020b).

Time will tell the extent to which these mutual aid efforts around ethical credit, affordability of utilities, availability of food, community arts, wellbeing, and environmental support translates into the social capital that Talwrn (2017) stresses that the state at all levels needs to help mobilise and which sees local people doing things together for themselves and others. But the worry that the Welsh voluntary sector expressed about resilience becoming a euphemism for state abandonment of social responsibilities, that leaves local people to fend for themselves (see below), could be offset by community development approaches underpinned by a political-economic literacy alert to the

structural reasons behind why some communities – to adopt the mainstream parlance – are ‘less resilient than others’ and ensure that policy responses to strengthening resilience are not merely ways of the state (opaquely) divesting itself of its responsibilities to communities and citizens (Seccombe, 2002 in Garrat et al, 2012; Ledwith, 2011; 2016; Hoban, 2002).

The growth in understanding of co-production and its fundamental tenet that more equitable relationships between service users and service providers must lie at the heart of service design and efficacy will continue to be helpful in building the social capital to which Talwrn refers. This remains as much the case for voluntary sector service provision as it does for those delivered by public sector; however, the continued existence of a subservience in relationships between these sectors remains a concern, even though there are encouraging signs in the areas of community education and social prescribing (Elliott et al, 2021).

Co-production’s focus on transforming the power dynamics of the nexus of service provision re-enforces how narratives of resilience recurrently focus on the ability to ‘bounce back’ to some former state, rather than aspire to something better or greater.

This enquiry is predicated on a belief that the pandemic has exposed weaknesses and undermined confidence in pre-existing concepts of resilience. Its success in unearthing new insights on the topic will in large part depend on the extent to which the “unthinking acceptance” of problems which “leads to conventional thinking about policies” can be avoided (Brill et al, 2015, p.10).

“If these policies are not working in their own terms, it is time to bring in new ideas from outside”

(ibid., p.10)

The Bevan Foundation echo these sentiments in a recent paper on the south Wales valleys and Valleys Taskforce:

“The taskforce aims to go beyond business as usual, to be change-making. By default, members have to be self-critical...The taskforce must ensure that challenge is consistently part of its work and that it translates into action”

(2019, 9)

Echoing Raymond Williams’s (1983, p.76) assertion that community – that “warmly persuasive word” – is never “used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term”, Elliott et al (2012) note how these strategies can be uncritically accepting of the notion of community and overlooking some of the negative aspects such as demands for conformity or exclusion of outsiders. An uncritical acceptance of the inherent virtues of resilience due to orthodox thinking has a parallel with Brill et al’s (2015) economic critique.

There is, of course, the way in which the term ‘community’ is co-opted by neoliberalism to obfuscate and soften the extent to which genuine concepts of communities are commodified and ‘bent’ to the will of the market (Noakes, 2020). For instance, in the community regeneration or community renewal schemes that acquiesce to, or even embrace, the primacy of property values as a metric for ‘improvement’, the accumulation of capital is facilitated by a complementary divestment in communities, by public *and* private sources, that serve to widen the local rent gap and re-enforce ‘territorial stigmatisation’ (ibid.). Narratives about areas ‘lacking resilience’, in these critiques of community resilience, re-enforce this stigmatization.

In the context of this enquiry, ‘from outside’ means those voices and interests *within* the Welsh voluntary sector that hitherto have felt they have little voice in debates about resilience; have had limited influence on the language, terminologies and discourse employed; or have resisted efforts to use the term uncritically (see Howard et al, 1999, in Garrat et al, 2021). In simple terms, who decides what comprises resilience?

5.9. The Welsh context

In recent years Welsh policy debate about resilience has been dominated by the implications of Welsh Government’s (WG) decision to wind up the Communities First (CF) programme. In November 2016 the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, Carl Sargeant, stated that:

“it is time for a new approach to building resilient communities. While Communities First has supported people in some of our most deprived areas over the last fifteen years, I am not convinced that continuing to focus on 52 small areas is the most effective way to deliver for Wales.

I am minded to phase out the Communities First programme while establishing a new approach to meet the challenges of the future. The new approach will focus on three key areas of employment, early years, and empowerment.

(Welsh Government, 2016)

The first two of the so-called 3 E’s – Employment and Early Years – were the continuation of established trajectories in WG policy, but Empowerment was the curate’s egg with little explanation or definition about what empowerment means, can be achieved or what it looks like (Todd, 2019; Elliott et al, 2021).

WCVA engaged the Welsh voluntary sector as part of a broader sector response to this policy shift, arguably a seismic one given the longevity of CF and staple of post-devolution WG policy (see Todd and Nicholl, 2018). There was a broad consensus across the sector over dissatisfaction with the term ‘resilience’ for the negative and unambitious connotations with merely ‘keeping one’s head above water’ and for its:

- risk of ignoring the external political, economic or environmental forces that perpetuate inequalities by focusing on communities’ ability to withstand them
- use in concealing or justifying the erosion of universal services, welfare provision, and social security

Reference to the 3E’s slowly dissipated from policy lexicon following the death of Carl Sargeant, leaving Employment (often mistakenly conflated with the term Employability) and Early Years to remain part of the post-CF policy focus, but leaving community Empowerment as an unfulfilled, and arguably lost, opportunity to reconfigure power relations and redistribute power away from the state and market in Wales (Todd, 2019).

The sector pointed out too that the Wellbeing of Future Generations (WFG) Act uses the term resilience in primarily an ecological sense and though it refers to the ‘social’ and the ‘economic’ in its definition of ‘A Resilient Wales’ (see fig.1), the Act conceives of these in terms of ‘overlying’ a bedrock of the environmental and biodiverse comprising:

Biodiversity and soil

Natural green space

Knowledge of nature

Water and air quality

Using natural resources

[Figure 1](#) – A resilient Wales as defined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015

A Resilient Wales

“A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.”

This definition of resilience is grounded in transition theory – the concern with how the world functions once the peak of oil supply has been passed and its supply gradually diminishes – makes a strong connection between global environmental conditions and the mantra of ‘think local, act local’ (Adamson and Lang, 2014). Crucially, it asserts that adaptations to ‘post-oil’ (and more specifically post-fossil fuel) economies must be developed *now* and not when the pressures of diminishing, unstable or insecure energy supplies begin to exert themselves on local economies and communities.

This thinking – seen also in WG’s planning for adaptation to climate change (2018a) – resonates greatly with the more recent emergence of a conception of resilience as the propensity to adapt, innovate and diversify. An attentiveness to these so-called ‘megatrends’ invites, via foresight and futures methodologies, the potential to anticipate some of the impacts that they may have.

At the system level certain capacities and characteristics are seen as important for the presence of resilience. These include: absorption, adaptability/flexibility, preparedness, anticipation, learning capacity and transformation (WHO, 2020). Though the literature around the resilience of services and organisations is more limited than that on ecology, environment, community and individuals, that which does exist is best appreciated from a systems perspective.

7. General observations on the definition

“Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again”

Nelson Mandela, 1994

At the start of each of the principal methodologies – survey, focus groups and interviews – participants were offered the opportunity to express initial views on the definition. In the latter pair, this opening element helped surface subjective meaning, perspectives and interpretations, got people talking, and shaped the subsequent semi-structured conversations in both methods.

Participants could be broadly grouped in three camps:

Accepted the definition, perhaps with some modest caveats and/or reservations

In this grouping are those for whom there was an acceptance of the definition’s overall tone and wording, but that the definition, and those behind its crafting, must remain cognisant and reflective of the sector’s current lived experiences.

This cohort also warned that an accurate, representative and co-produced definition is on its own not guaranteed to gain traction with those outside the sector who can influence resilience:

I would say it's very helpful to have something like [this definition]

FG3B

It's resilience as I'd define it but whether it's possible in the current circumstances sometimes it's very difficult especially around people with disabilities because you know there is more fear amongst them and also they've lost so much

FGDB

I think I understand the definition and that is actually what it should be, but my argument is I don't think this is currently [reflected] on the ground

FGDD

the definition was, was great. But if only life was that simple, you know?

VTC1

I think that is a perfectly valid statement.

S7W

I'm particularly interested in responses to whether organisations feel like their voices are being heard. Where the thing needs to connect [is] at a level that they cannot activate themselves directly, that they need to be heard.

FG4C

Whilst the definition is good for an organisation in the pandemic circumstances, many are in a constant form of resilience as are the people that they support and therefore resilience is a multi faceted entity

S3W

I agree with the [definition] itself, it's context is initially pointed out. Yes, we've been through [a] major crisis and we're trying to support and provide third sector support as required, but elements of it could have been prevented with additional investment over the last 10 years...some of what [the pandemic] has led to, it could have been avoided.

FG4A

*I think the definition is a good one...Building our resilience is a positive characteristic in the right context, **if** it refers to our ability to adapt in a changing and less than perfect world, **if** it refers to us finding ways of not being completely vulnerable*

IW1 (own emphasis)

Problematic elements to the definition

There were principally three main 'red flags' raised by participants in relation to the wording:

- the 'long term'
- 'crises'
- 'preparing for'

Long term

There was recurrent reference to how difficult it presently is to consider the long term, let alone plan for it, because of the trauma and disruption to the sector and the state of flux it still finds itself in. This will come as little surprise, but for many what is antagonising this difficulty is the influence of other agents outside the voluntary sector on shaping one, what constitutes 'long-term'; and two, how they influence the sector's ability to look to the long term.

In short, although this is a definition of resilience for the voluntary sector, it cannot remain a definition of concern *only* to it: a definition of resilience must carry with it – in its wording and how it is taken forward – a recognition by those outside the sector that they can help or harm the sector's ability to consider the long term.

"survive and thrive in the long term"? Everything to me is done on short term. I don't see any long term solutions because we're still speaking the same language we've been speaking for years... We're just like a broken record, we just keep going round and round and round. So I love the definition but is that reality? I don't think so

FGDD

It's very difficult to plan for the long term given how the funding streams operate currently. It needs to not just be the charities themselves, it needs to be a bigger picture all the way round, I think, so that we can plan for the long term

FG6E

It says 'thrive in the long term'. Thriving in the long term means you need funding more than 6 months [that]'s got to be decided today and it's got to be spent and all the rest of it in such short turnarounds so you lose time to plan, prep and build partnerships

FG6D

In addition the following quotes point to another demand that funders make related to the concept of resilience as innovation. The word adaptable – as well as flexible and malleable – frequently cropped up in the enquiry, and there was a broad consensus that this is a relevant component of resilience as well as something the sector does well, both at times of crisis and in ‘peacetime’. Several examples of innovation were mentioned where organisations had chosen to innovate around areas such as digital technology, trustee recruitment and succession planning, and service design in response to, for instance, internal evaluation, through learning from others or from specific innovation programmes. But pressure to *arbitrarily* innovate was harshly criticised for militating against long term planning, and/or pulling organisations away from their core purpose and mission; constant short-term innovation that leads to longer-term ‘mission drift’.

We have these time-limited projects that funders think 'that's great' but...when you come to the end of the project, you've more than met your goals [yet] you can't apply for the funding again because they won't fund the same project again - but it's been successful! So then you have to adapt and change that project to turn it into something slightly different in order to be able to try and get the next round of funding

FG3B

[Funding] can enable but it can be too prescriptive, narrow. It can be too short-lived - a year's programme by the time you've taken the time to set it up, establish, it's time to finish...and this thing about if a programme is working well, it's getting the results, people are getting the outcomes that they need from the programme, but it's only for a year because 'oh we won't fund it again because we want something totally new'. What's wrong with you people?!

FG5A

Certain things are going to always need to be there for people. It isn't going to change however fabulously innovatively we come up with a new name for 'befriending' [for example]. We're always coming up with new names but...to continually have to rehash something that actually works is such a waste of energy and time and resources that I just....[throws hands up exasperated]

FG5D

There's a danger of mission drift here: 'oh we'll jump this way cos we'll get a few bob', 'we'll jump that way cos we'll get a few more bob'

FGDA

This will not be the first example cited in this paper of potentially internally competing and conflicting demands made of organisations and the sector in the quest to enhance resilience. In recognition of the temporal aspects of resilience a Welsh speaking participant suggested the following small but potentially important adjustment to the definition that serves to highlight that a focus on the long term must not come at the expense of the here and now.

Gallu mudiad i baratoi am, ymateb i, ac addasu i newid ac argyfyngau, er mwyn ei galluogi i oroesi a ffynnu yn awr ac yn y tymor hir

The ability of an organisation to prepare for, respond to, and adapt to change and crises, enabling it to survive and thrive in the present and in the long term

FG7A, emphasis added

The final point worth raising in respect of the long term is the assumption it possibly engenders that organisation must exist for the long term. Some participants prefer a definition that makes reference to the duration of an organisation's existence, thus reflecting that some organisations might only ever have short-term goals.

Dwi ddim yn credu bod cyfeirio at y tymor hir yn fuddiol...Fe ellid diffinio beth yw y 'tymor hir' mewn nifer o wahanol ffyrdd ac yn gyffredinol, dim ond y mudiadau mwy sydd yn debygol o barhau am ddegawdau

I don't believe that reference to the long term is helpful...One can define what is 'long term' in a number of different ways and generally, only larger organisations are likely to continue for decades

S29W

Some [organisations] have a natural lifespan and the fact that a charitable organisation does not continue to operate in the longer term does not diminish the contribution it makes whilst it is active

FG7A

Crises

As Diaz (2020) points out some crises do not arise out of sudden shocks. After a slow, patiently corrosive process a point can be reached that brings about the same sort of disruption, pressure and uncertainty as a sudden shock.

In this respect several participants were keen for the scale of the pandemic's impact to not obscure what was already a difficult situation that the voluntary sector had been facing. It is a moot point whether the pandemic has made an already bad situation worse.

I think the word crises should be removed

S3T

The term crises is a bit strong, I think adversity would be a better term. Perseverance could also be in this definition

S13W

Disagree with the word crises. It is too strong and potentially misleading. Adversity would be a better word

S5W

Even without a crisis many of us are actually on the point of not survival nothing to do with a crisis just because of the way things are going that there's no money out there

FGDA

I think the [pandemic] has just reiterated the fact that you know services were going to be cut regardless and...a lot of underhand things went on under the cover of covid and...as third sector workers we're the ones that have to come along and pick up the pieces...It's proving to be really really difficult

FGDB

Any cracks that were in the organisations before are really starting to show up now [after the pandemic]

FG1B, own emphasis

Maybe it's that the current situation has just shined a light on something that was already there. We are in a crisis and things have drastically changed, but there was stuff bubbling under the surface before

FG4E

There is also a degree of subjectivity about what constitutes a crisis and the fact that opportunity is not a stranger to crisis either. In the same way that the negative impacts of a crisis cannot always be foreseen, neither can the unexpected opportunities:

We cannot predict how long is a piece of string: what is a crisis, when's it going to hit us. What might be a crisis for me might not be a crisis for [another participant], might not be a crisis for [organisation] you know?

FGDA

'Prepare for' from a small charity point of view is not easy. To produce strategic plans, to produce your risk register to cover everything, it takes time that we often don't have. When I look at what we've done over the last 18 months, were we prepared for it? No. Did we happen by chance to have most of what we needed in place? Yes...And this allowed us to survive and I have to say thrive. Over the last year we managed to increase our income by 20%. Which wouldn't have happened without covid. It's all down to Covid

FG3B

Preparing for

This quote leads helpfully into the final element around which there was recurring issues: the extent to which preparedness is a helpful term, in the definition.

The pandemic undoubtedly was a crisis, arguably existential in nature in the way it shook the foundations of so many accepted societal norms (Putnam, 2020). We were told to keep apart from each other, including close family; many of us were paid to *not* work; mobility was severely curtailed with many of us confined to our immediate localities for weeks and months on end; and philosophical debates abounded about what constituted 'key work'.

There was a pragmatic thread running through many in the enquiry around the extent to which an organisation, or the sector collectively, can do all the preparation it can to mitigate crises; or has the time and resource to do so adequately (as evidenced in the previous quote). In addition, as has already been noted, external agents may well undermine your preparations.

To this end, a balance needs to be struck between planning for potential difficulties, and a focus on how recovery might happen:

'Prepare for' from a small charity point of view is not easy. To produce strategic plans, to produce your risk register to cover everything, it takes time that we often don't have.

FG3B

I am wary of the word 'prepared for', in case it means the sector being encouraged to do complex business continuity plans for a range of different scenarios. If an organisation has clear purpose and a clear set of principles, it can adapt its methods to any circumstances. Many of us had not prepared for a pandemic but we just kept working to purpose and principle in the pandemic by adapting our methods.

IW1

From my point of view...resilience really is not about the preparing side of it. It's about the bouncing back and the recovery from adversity or issues or problems

FGDC

I mostly agree with this statement, however, I think it is hard for small or medium charities to prepare for challenges

S13W

I don't know if 'preparing for' is necessarily integral to it because it's more reactionary from my perspective. In the past as a small charity, preparation wasn't one of our strong suits shall we say! [Despite this] we have adapted and survived....Obviously I think resilience in general, forward planning, strategic planning and prep is better. But we haven't always had that

FG3C

Balance was a word that cropped up repeatedly during the enquiry. The need for two or more elements that on their own are seen as contributing to resilience can become antagonistic if considered overly in isolation from one another.

The need to be agile, adaptable or flexible (these words tended to interchange among participants) was difficult if excess preparation, scenario planning and foresight work is undertaken; in short, an organisation can over-prepare and become too rigid and resistant to the necessary agility that a challenge might require.

It became clear in the pandemic that the large well known charities struggled to change their methods of working due to the procedures and policies in place, they did however engage quickly in emergency issues such as food and medicine deliveries

S4V

I mostly agree with this statement, however, I think it is hard for small or medium charities to prepare for challenges. I think being adaptable or malleable is more accurate.

S13W

The chief officer of one medium-sized voluntary organisation serving a largely rural community stressed that the traditional approach to strategic business planning was a thing of the past due to the pandemic, if indeed it hadn't already become obsolete; this was echoed by an interviewee:

The traditional business model [of] a business plan which is often on everyone's desk or it's holding the door open, that traditional model doesn't actually fit [now]. We have a one page business plan, a statutory document which is supported by other papers

FG6D

I think the definition is a good one, though I am wary of the word 'prepared for', in case it means the sector being encouraged to do complex business continuity plans for a range of different scenarios.

IW1

Others in this particular focus group shared this general view and anticipated aspects of their respective organisations' usual strategic planning – of mission, risk management, personnel etc. – probably needing to change.

Reject the concept of resilience

The voluntary sector in Wales has expressed reticence with the term and concept of resilience previously for its unambitious connotations with 'making do' (Todd and Nicholl, 2018). If anything, this perception may have hardened over the course of the pandemic.

For me it's the 'survive' that throws me off somehow, it's just surviving. You do have the 'thrive' - surviving a crisis isn't good, it's the growth from that throws me off from this.

FG4B

Resilience is now used too easily and interpreted as a positive thing. It is actually a neutral thing [because] we spring back to the same place we started from when put under pressure. There is NO going forward in the word. It is essentially about stasis. Resilience is a NO progress thing...It is an excuse to reduce expectation of normal development and not properly fund advances or any real development of any sort

S10W

I have a problem with the word resilience itself, you know, the word resilience, I think it should be thrown away far far away.

VTC4

There were several suggestions about alternative words for resilience, but which nevertheless echoed the general sentiment of the definition; or there was a desire to emphasise particular components or elements of resilience (e.g., flexibility). For example:

I would rather have a flexible organisation than a resilient one because to me resilient is almost like...it's a little bit stiff, it's a little bit rigid. Whereas personally I think I would rather the organisation I work for being known as flexible

FG1C

Distinct from these more cosmetic or semantic objections there was a view held by a significant, though by no means a majority, group who contended that the concept of resilience, howsoever defined, is one to which they object on principled grounds.

There was a particular strength of feeling towards this in one of the 'open' focus groups (FG4), as well as the focus group looking at resilience through a lens of disability (FGD), and from a participant in the validation through consultation exercise who works with an organisation that support women from black and ethnic minority communities. Her contribution echoes the experiences in Newham cited in the literature (Garrat, et al, 2021).

I had the pleasure of listening to Diane Reay⁹...about the idea of social mobility and [she] was talking about [it] as an extreme form of symbolic violence hiding so many things...the idea that you could become socially mobile, and if you didn't it was your fault. And each time I see the word resilience it makes me feel quite violated and I think within the context of the definition, perhaps, there is an assumption that there is a context in which organisations need to be resilient...it feels as if we're being asked to address something which is a systemic failure, by developing a skill which actually we shouldn't need to have in the first place

FG4C

I know that an awful lot of people, myself included have great concerns about the use of the term resilience in relation to individuals and their situation in society and it completely overlooks systemic issues, politics, inequality, social inequalities etc.

FGDA

Some organisations, they have always been forced to play by a set of different rules? Absolutely...I hate to say that, I don't know if I'm using the right terminology here, but they are excluded from the mainstream. And that very definition of resilience is actually, I'm still here today. Because the conditions that they are asked to function, work, operate under – what other organisations, you know, the mainstream would call crisis – [is] a state of constant crisis [for us].

VTC3

You're dealing with all these things that are thrown at you. And we don't actually question sometimes: are we right to be resilient? Are we questioning the things that are happening to us? Should they be happening to us? Is the government more responsible for these things rather than us being 'oh, we're resilient'? Perhaps what is happening is wrong, unjust; so why should we be putting up with it and being resilient when we should be questioning it and dealing with it in a diff way and questioning policies makers and govt?

FG5C

It feels like there is a big ownership around the term resilience on you, the individual, on the organisation to do all that it can without maybe taking into account the actual difficulty of

⁹ Diane Reay is a Professor of Sociology. She was the eldest of eight children and grew up on a council estate; during her childhood she was in receipt of free school dinners.

the situation that might be presenting already...it feels like it's a pressure, the word feels quite loaded.

FG4E

It does give you the idea of how much pressure can you take before you break

FG4B

Let me be brutally honest here I don't even want to be bloody resilient. Let's be frank I just want to do the job, I want the people to get their help and move on you know? I want to see continuity...I can't be bothered about resilience. I mean what does it mean? Is it a good thing to have? I don't know if its a good thing because I don't think I planned to have it I was pushed to do it because of the situation I'm in

FGDD

'To prepare for and respond to change and crises' - it's like a deficit mindset, not a positive

FG5A

For somebody to come and ask me how resilient I am, it's kind of like a kick in the stomach, you know, as on a personal level and not just taking it to my organisation. [My] first reaction to the survey, the word 'resilience', it was to be quite blunt, laughable. You know, what are we doing with it? We've been, we are living resiliently every single day. So what more do you want to add on top of the resilience to define the word resilience? So the word in itself doesn't help at all

VTC4

This resonates with the section of radically-inflected literature that posits that concepts of resilience are a way of controlling the voluntary sector; of silencing it; of undermining its organising capability; and of neutering its campaigning potency. Or of bolstering notions of the so-called 'shadow state' i.e., voluntary and not-for-profit sector organisations undertaking those activities that were once the domain of the state.

One of the 'open' focus groups was particularly energised by this area of discussion (FG1) and they expressed it explicitly, but also in relation to what happens once a definition is agreed, for example programmes or projects geared towards training in 'how to be resilient', or in volunteers being expected to pick up more and more responsibility and burden:

*If we train and control the voluntary sector - which we're in danger of doing - the whole point of the voluntary sector was people coming together wanting to meet a need that they'd identified, and the freedom to do that in the way they wanted to...If through working closely with statutory agencies [they] start to control part of the [voluntary] sector, you know what's going to happen: a whole you new sector is going to come up from somewhere else that works on the side - like the *real* voluntary sector should!*

FG1B

The danger...at the end of this piece of work is that WCVA gets some money and it says 'Go off and train the sector to be resilient'. And 'it's totally up to you; we have no responsibility for this [e.g.,] how the health board works, or the council relates to us'

FG1A

[The] public sector is getting cut back so much, us as volunteers are getting asked to do more and more and more. And the resilience bit is about knowing where your boundaries are and being able to say 'no' to that. So for example my museum friends group. It's quite academic - researching local history, having talks [and] for raising money for [the] museum. What it's not for is for helping the museum keep going or to keep the basics like information boards. And what it's certainly not is in these joint spaces¹⁰ to help the library out

FG1A

Of the statutory sector, including Welsh government:

On a day to day level their expectations are getting higher and higher

FG1B

In focus group FG1 there was a feeling that debates about resilience can, perhaps unintendedly, lead to the voluntary sector being placed 'over a barrel':

Statutory agencies have got this view of the sector that it always delivers. And we do! We always deliver and it's almost as if our mindset is we've got to get on with it, we've got to deliver and...we don't know when to say no. Or we feel uncomfortable to say no. Or we worry that if we say no that the statutory agencies will go straight to the [grassroots] voluntary sector and treat them the way they're treating us

FG1B, own emphasis

It's even harder for us to say no because we're almost like the last gatekeeper and if we [say no] then it's not going to get done. And because we know the community as people - and they're not statistics, they're not numbers, they're not [defined by] their disability, they're people - then who's going to help Mrs Jones who's desperately being trying to get X, Y and Z done?

FG1C

Lastly, participants in the validation through consultation exercise suggested that the cohort who reject the concept of resilience might be larger in the sector than our sample suggests

¹⁰ 'Joint spaces' in this context refers to the increasingly popular publicly-owned facilities in which several facilities, e.g., libraries, community halls, public IT provision, that might have once stood alone are now co-located on a single site and/or in a single building. Often these are called 'community hubs, despite communities tending to have very little say in how they are configured, operated and used. For a critique of this model in Wales, see Elliott et al (2021).

As noted, some terms were used interchangeably, such as flexibility and adaptability, brave and courage. If these were conflated to single terms the prominence of certain words would be even greater.

Clearly most respondents cited other words with positive or broadly favourable meanings, but it is worth noting a couple of the less favourable words that were mentioned: depressing, conformity, Sisyphean¹², stasis.

This tendency towards considering resilience as a virtue was re-emphasised when people were asked the question 'Do you consider 'resilience' a positive characteristic?', to which there was a unanimous agreement among survey respondents that it is.

The only exceptions among survey respondents were a solitary trustee and a solitary worker. The former felt that that element routinely held up as a virtue of resilience – fortitude – was not something to be proud of. While the worker was even more critical, considering the term to be a smokescreen to obfuscate ulterior motives of under-funding, withdrawing support, and silencing criticism.

It's often presented as a "show some backbone" or "stiff upper lip" response to tough times or doggedness. We have done this all our lives and find it very condescending

S1T

It is an excuse to reduce expectation of normal development and not properly fund advances or any real development of any sort. It actually defines returning to a starting point and your paraphrasing its meaning obscures the systemic way of its current destructive use

SW10

[Resilience] is not a positive characteristic if it refers to how far individuals and organisations can bend without being broken. If it is used by governments to refer to how far one can reduce benefits and organisational funding before breaking people and organisations

IW1

On the whole though workers in the sector were the most emphatic in their reasons for considering resilience to be a positive characteristic, tending to cite the notions of either strength or more popularly flexibility and adaptability as the main reason (reflected in their prominence in the word cloud).

Life throws all sorts of stuff at us all the time. You bend or you break. Breaking is pointless. Bending allows growth

S17W

[Resilience] is a symbol of strength

S20W

¹² In Greek mythology Sisyphus was punished by rolling an immense boulder up a hill only for it to roll down every time it neared the top and repeating this action for eternity. A Sisyphean task is one said to be impossible to complete.

Life is full of unexpected events, ups and down, negatives and positives, failures and successes, and no one is exempt from this. Being resilient enables us to cope with all these aspects of life, continue to succeed, carry on trying etc

S8W

This overwhelming consensus was not reflected, however, in the focus group discussions where the opportunity afforded to people to probe the concept of resilience a bit deeper perhaps helped reveal alternative and competing positions and interpretations. Indeed, across all methodologies a handful of people hinted at their view on resilience changing, or at least being challenged, because of the pandemic and the opportunity to consider it further thanks to this enquiry.

[There's been] a fairly standard definition of resilience, one that's been in common use for some time, however the understanding of it has changed thanks to the pandemic, Brexit, BLM and WeShallNotBeRemoved

S14W

The opportunity for continued sector deliberation and discussion about the term resilience, rather than mere consultation, would surely be beneficial. Not just for the learning that would happen but because it could serve also to further develop collective effort and co-operation across the sector, prominent elements that recurrently cropped up in our enquiry.

9. Contexts in which ‘resilience’ is used by the voluntary sector

“Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud”

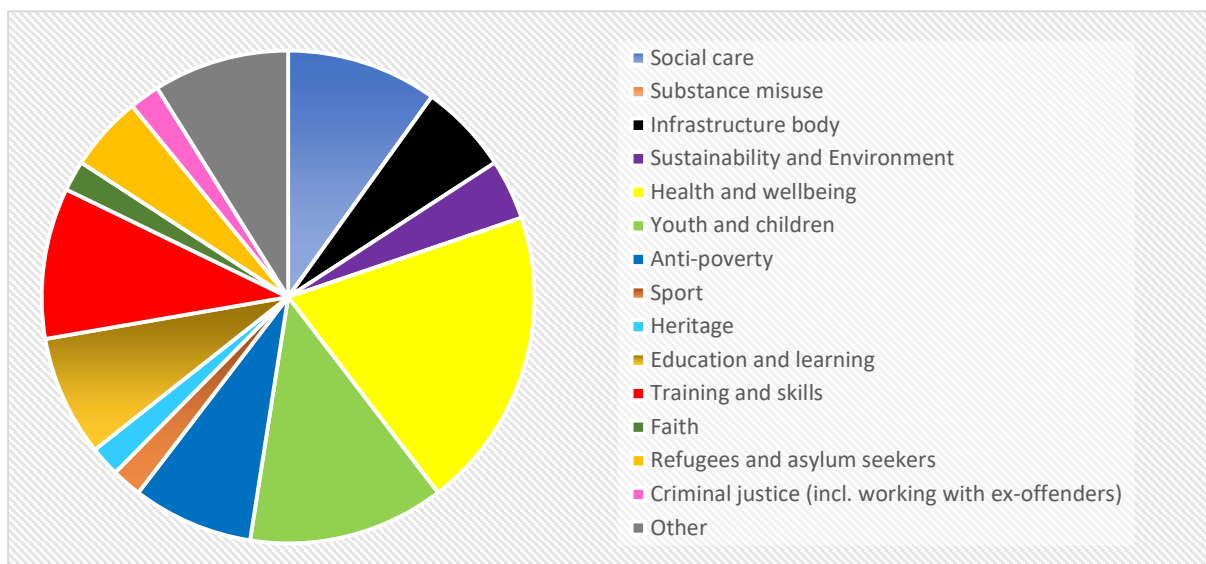
Maya Angelou, 2008

In part because, as Harrison (2013) observes, the concept of resilience has ‘saturated’ policy strategies, but also in recognition of the diversity of the voluntary sector in Wales and the subjective nature of people’s views, we felt it important to probe the different contexts in which their organisations use the term resilience (if they do at all).

Survey participants were first invited to state in which area of the voluntary sector their organisation works (figure 3) and then specify as many of the following six categories as were relevant to their organisation (figure 4):

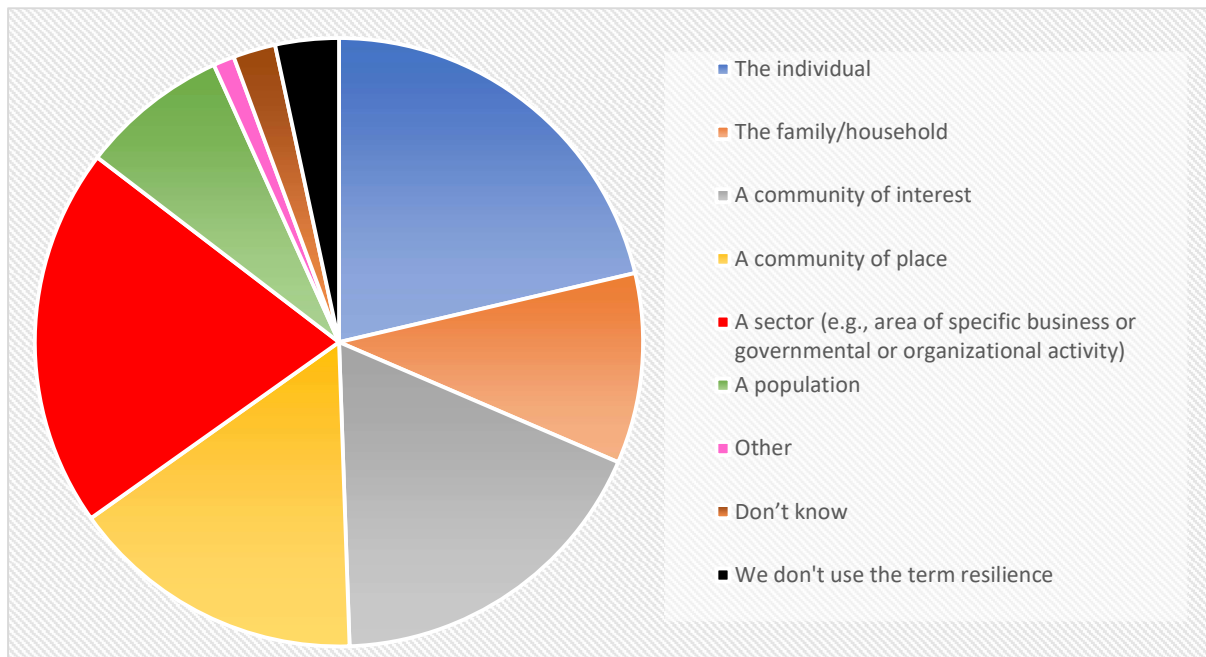
- The individual
- Family/household
- Community of interest
- Community of place
- A sector (e.g., economy, environment)
- At a population level
- Other

Figure 3 – In what part(s) of the voluntary sector do you volunteer/work/act as a trustee?



A pleasingly diverse range of areas of the sector participated in the survey with health and social care the best represented area of the sector. The areas referred to under the category ‘Other’ comprised community development, arts and specific aspects of social care and/or health e.g., older people support.

Figure 4 – the context(s) in which respondents’ organisations apply the term resilient



More than one could be ticked and similar to the breadth of sectors from which we drew respondents, there was a diverse range of contexts. Given the tendency for respondents to have reservations over the application of resilience in the context of the individual, it is interesting to observe that it remains preponderant, along with a sectoral application (the most popular of which are the environment or the economy).

In addition, we encouraged focus group participants to tell us about the context(s) in which they use the term resilience. Unsurprisingly, for some the experience of the pandemic had blurred the boundaries between their personal lives and professional lives and so the context(s) in which resilience was relevant to people had similarly converged. For others the pandemic continued to be disruptive to such an extent that the ‘immediacy’ of its impact hindered the ability to consider resilience more broadly or abstractly.

We're all resilient every day, to some extent aren't we? Everybody's home life changed when covid hit. People had to find someone to go and do someone's shopping and leave it on the front door...[and] not being able to see family other than outside - you have to be quite resilient to get through that

FG1C

The amount of work that's coming at us. I'm finding it unbelievable and the expectations of govt and everyone else to meet those needs...You don't work in the voluntary sector if you're looking for an easy life

FG1B

For others their personal experiences and backgrounds influenced their interpretations of resilience, invariably which tended to conceive of resilience in an individual context i.e., of people overcoming difficulties, coping and ‘getting on’ (irrespective of the moral dimension of whether one should have to be resilient or not).

I think about [resilience] a lot in a sporting context. I was a rugby coach of kids and young adults for many, many years and you see an awful lot of resilience there, people overcoming barriers...I once had one particular girl who had a very unhappy background and just trying to get to the rugby was hard enough for her...And [rugby] actually helped her in school; she was forever being disqualified [sic] from school for one reason or another. But over time that discipline she needed on the rugby pitch came over into her personal life and she was doing better and better in school. And she managed to get to university in the end. I like those sorts of stories; that's what resilience to me is

FG3B

Several participants preferred to conceive of resilience in a collective sense. For some this meant 'those connected/involved with an organisation' or in a less institutional sense e.g., a 'community'. Though they did not disassociate themselves as individual workers or trustees completely from this wider context, they were able to differentiate between their and others' individual experiences of being resilient (or not) and of the wider collective 'entity'; including the recognition that a collective resilience is not necessarily merely the sum total of several individuals' resilience.

Indeed, the organisation, whatever its size – though particularly medium sized and larger voluntary organisations – offers a valuable 'crucible' for the exploration of the concept of resilience as well as the opportunity to build collective forms of it (howsoever defined). This issue of collectivism will be returned to.

The fact [is] that the organisation...doesn't exist unless you've got people to help run it. The resilience possibly [comes from] identifying people with the confidence, the ability, and the skills and the willingness to volunteer to form that organisation

FG6B

I've been working for a lot of years in health, social care, education and the voluntary sector and one thing that never ceases to amaze me is that we've had really fabulous examples of communities pulling together - we've all, each and every one of us in this group has spoken of the fabulous things that happened and came out of what was a crisis across the world, not just Wales

FG5D

When we work with communities we have 3 tiers: what people or communities do for themselves; what do they need a little bit of help with [e.g.] the help of a CVC or the planning department at the council...or do they need the public service intervention where the community doesn't have the capacity to deliver something we then get public services in at that level. It is all about what can we do together for ourselves collectively. It's changing that thing on its head about positivity and resilience-building

FG5A

You kind of need a shared goal or shared vision that everybody's behind otherwise individual resilience won't be aimed in the same direction or towards the same outcomes. If you don't have that cohesive team, with or without resilience, going forward is much more difficult. Even if all the individuals are resilient within themselves

FG3C

It is worth noting even those who were critical of the concept of resilience, or even rejecting it outright, nevertheless recognised a collectiveness to the debate. Those who embrace the concept uncritically potentially weaken the sector more widely:

Why people nod their head and say "yes resilience of course, what a good thing" is beyond understanding. The use and acceptance of the concept of resilience weakens everyone

S10W

We asked participants if their organisations used an existing definition of resilience. Approximately 80% of survey respondents claim their organisations do not. And even those who do, tended to be reticent about it: that it perhaps was now redundant due to the pandemic; is kept 'in house' because of the 'loadedness' or complexity of the term; was confined to a particular form of resilience (usually finance related); or was conflated and/or wrapped-up in a statement related to sustainability (again, usually with a financial emphasis)

10. Sustainability

“Ryn ni yma o hyd, er gwaetha pawb a phopeth”

Dafydd Iwan, 1981

Several respondents spoke about resilience in the context of sustainability. Some referred to sustainability in specific contexts such as sustainable funding (FG1B, FG3B, FG4B), sustainable business support (FG1B) or sustainable strategy (FG3C, FG4A), but the concept of sustainable development helped some to conceptualise resilience within a broader systems approach in a manner transcending what organisations can do, either individually or as part of a collective endeavour.

“There is a strong link between resilience and sustainable development and that anything that is not delivered in a truly sustainable way does not contribute to resilience overall – at a whole world level

FG7A

The word I suggested [instead of resilience] was sustainability...When you change the word to sustainability, it will cover everything that you're talking about, including, you know, the funding part you were talking about

VTC4

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (WFG) Act was felt to offer a helpful framework for this conceptualisation (FG7A, FG3C):

I think instead of trying to rewrite the script why not link it to existing progress so for example the Wellbeing of Future Generations [Act] talks about much of the things we need

FG4E

SW10 – so critical of the concept of resilience – praised the Act for the framework it offered to thinking in a manner more conducive to a systems approach; indeed, they felt a UK-wide WFG Act would have produced a different, more humane approach to dealing with the pandemic.

A small number of participants noted how the pandemic had challenged previous conceptions of the resilient organisation whose resilience was primarily defined in financial terms, be that the size of its reserves, its funding mix, or how ‘entrepreneurial’ it was in generating earned income.

Previously we were considered resilient due to a business model that enabled strong [levels of] earned income and little reliance on statutory funding. Post pandemic we found ourselves in crisis. The loss of all earned income make us more fragile than our funding reliant peers.

S14W

It was queried whether or not a universally-accepted definition of resilience for the sector was agreed, the challenges posed by climate change dwarf all of the potential ‘micro-challenges’ together facing the voluntary sector. Furthermore, that the competitive, extractive, capitalist paradigm of our time is “no longer an appropriate one...for current circumstances” (FG7A).

We should be clear that this structuralist perspective was expressed by a small minority. But it helps draw attention to the risk of the sector 'turning inward' the concept of resilience and parochializing it from wider issues.

11. Factors affecting resilience

“At the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can”

Frida Kahlo, 1927

A draft paper has been devised by WCVA that identifies twelve factors. See [Appendix 4](#) for further detail, including illustrations of these indicators in practice:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Purpose | 8. Sustainable Funding |
| 2. Strategy | 9. Risk Management |
| 3. Impact | 10. Innovation and Creativity |
| 4. Leadership | 11. Networks and Relationships |
| 5. Good Governance | 12. Communication and |
| 6. Quality Assurance | Engagement |
| 7. People | |

It was beyond the scope of the enquiry to critique and analyse each of these in detail. Indeed, as Diaz (2020) points out in relation to organisational innovation, the extent to which an organisation focuses on and changes its, say, approach to risk may well have a knock-on effect on the sustainability of its funding mix. These indicators are not static for organisations and the way in which they blend will differ from organisation to organisation.

As well as for this reason, we did not individually critique these factor by factor. This would have been too time-consuming and may have served to excessively isolate them from one another in conceptual terms. Rather, we presented them as a list in the order shown, emphasised that there was no ranking at play, and invited focus group participants to comment as they saw fit.

It is worth noting that several of them routinely cropped up throughout the enquiry outside of the specific moments our facilitators raised them in the focus groups or when the survey touched on them.

In addition, survey participants were invited to grade each for importance in the survey on a value continuum from ‘Very unimportant’ (zero) to ‘Very important’ (100). This method allows for both:

- An average score of importance
- A spread of scores i.e, the lowest and highest, allowing for the noting of any ‘outliers’ (these are stated below where relevant)

Figure 4 shows a fairly equal regard for each of the dozen indicators, all ranking between the 68th and 88th percentile. **Communication and Engagement** and **People** are the two indicators considered most important, which might be expected given the preponderance for participants to work in health and wellbeing, social care, and youth/children (figure 3 above) and for them to use the term resilience most commonly in the context of the individual.

A couple of additional comments were volunteered by participants which re-enforce the general regard for each factor:

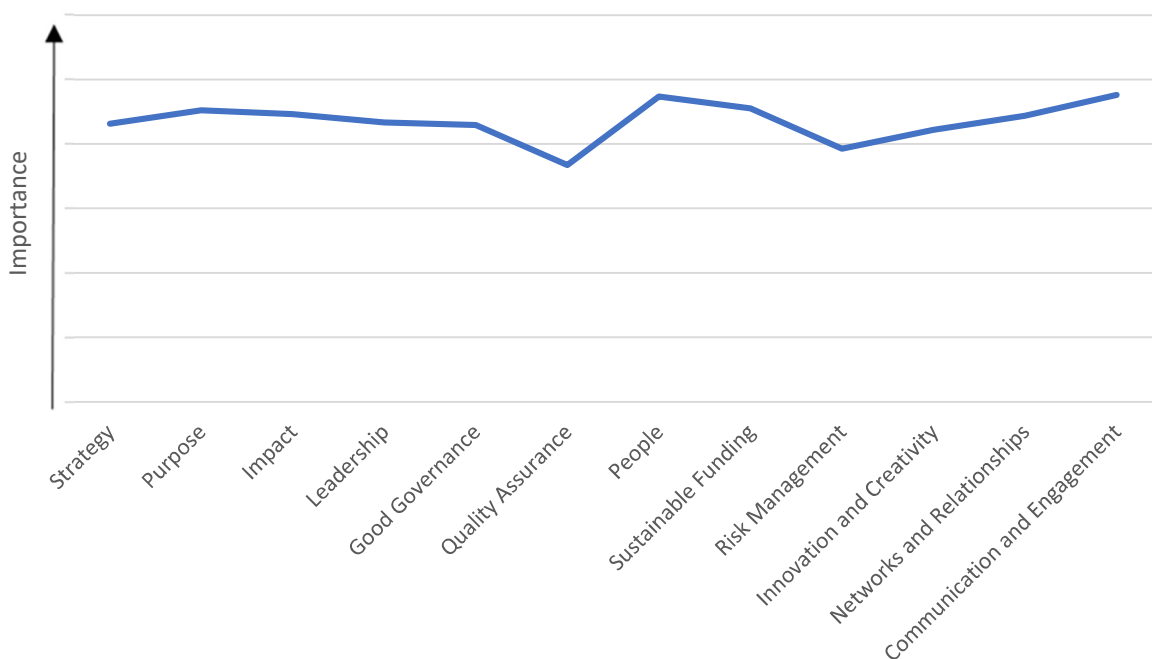
All crucial

S15W

All valuable all good and a shame to prioritise as prioritising is also a submission to opt for some form of ineffectiveness in one's operation

S10W

Figure 5 – Importance of the twelve indicators contributing to resilience according to participants



The focus groups generally speaking reflected the trend in the surveys for a marginal preference towards the importance of **Communication and Engagement** and **People**. We are minded to suggest that this is in part due to the interactive, discussive nature of the focus groups lending themselves to a focus on those indicators of resilience that are similarly interactive, people-focussed and animated.

Nevertheless, participants stressed that though the indicators might be of broadly similar importance they should not be considered similar in terms of the extent to which they can be planned and prepared for. **Good Governance** and **Risk**, for instance, can be honed by following proscribed regulations, good practice and can be externally verified. Some participants from smaller organisations were quick to point that larger voluntary organisation often have dedicated personnel to manage such aspects of their operations.

Notwithstanding, the existence of standards for engagement in Wales¹³, good quality community engagement and involvement also benefits from the happenstance and the unpredictable, no matter how much planning is done.

Sometimes it [engagement] happens because you get a town or community council that 'gets' it, or an individual - but that can be total serendipity. It's not an organised process

FG1A

¹³ National Principles for Public Engagement: <https://wcva.cymru/influencing/engagement/>

The recognition that **People** are a factor that informs and shapes resilience was welcomed. Some participants were concerned that the focus on organisational resilience might de-personalise the issue; obscuring the fact that organisations are made up of people – both paid and unpaid in the case of voluntary organisations – and are home to a vibrant but ‘messy’ array of networks and relationships. Given the way in which almost all the participants in our enquiry engage with people outside of their organisation on a daily basis in different ways and on different levels – as service users, as people in need, as commissioners, as contractors and so on – the interface between these intra-organisation networks and the community-based relations generates new vibrancy and increases the ‘messiness’; what Yeo (2001) calls those relations that are ‘full of awkward elbows’.

We know the community as people and they're not statistics, they're not numbers, they're not [defined by] their disability; they're people

FG1C

And that's how I feel about the small groups in [my county]. We know them as people

FG1B in direct response to the previous quote

We have a good team here. What makes us resilient, flexible, adaptable is the fact I can go to any member of staff in our organisation and say 'will you do 'this'?' and they will say 'of course I will'

FG1C

Following on from this point was the importance – but again the intrinsic ‘messiness’ – of facilitation of these networks, both informal and formal; and in some cases the transition from the former to the latter during the pandemic¹⁴. The formalisation of a definition of resilience and of the contributory indicators was welcomed if it brought increased recognition among funders and commissioners of the importance of facilitation (the term organising was also used).

We're desperately trying to organise. We're working with three other third sector organisations...to desperately try to get a people's panel together, a citizens' panel. That's something the funders have asked us to do. But the funders are not willing to help facilitate that. So, 'you want this but you're not willing to give us a venue or anything else to go with it' so it's all down to us

FG1C

The time that quality, effective engagement requires was something else which some participants felt is under-appreciated by funders, if not in a theoretical sense, too often in a practical respect in relation to funding schemes. The following quotes are drawn from a wider discussion on the disproportionate demands made on voluntary organisations in relation to the time available across a range of areas, including engagement:

If funding could [have] more of a long-term view. Its impossible to plan long term in the current situation, or in previous situations. You just don't get the long term funding do you?

FG6F

¹⁴ A handful of participants referred positively about the impact of the pandemic on bringing people together in virtual/digital fora who had previously been dispersed and fragmented, or even resistant to efforts to be brought into networks.

*With a lot of funding bids they're so short notice with such a short timescale and it really doesn't favour smaller organisations. And that in itself is quite disheartening as well thinking 'We can *nearly* do this' but I can't get the timing to work. There's not enough hours in the day to put something together to access it. And you can see the potential and sometimes it'd [It would] be better not having access to those things at all than having it dangled there as a carrot you can never get*

FG6G

One particular theme that merged with respect to **People** was the value of not only the availability of networks but opportunities for mentoring within them, and around which there was a consensus of the benefit to the sector. The reciprocity at the heart of the mentor/mentee relationship and the ownership and autonomy that those involved have in how the relationship is developed offers potential for not only learning new ways of doing things or navigating obstacles, but building capacity, trust and forging new attitudes.

In [our organisation] we've just taken on two new trustees, both are young. But we've allocated one trustee [each] to be their mentor....so they are fully able to participate in decision-making and governance within any of our meetings.

FG6D

I'm not sure we'd have got to where we are [over the last year] without having had the input [mentoring] that we had. That's the thing about mentoring, it's not about being told what to do. It's about having a different perspective or having someone else's experience there on the side as a way to expand your thinking.

FG6G

It's about attitudes isn't it? In my own research a long time ago I looked at 3 market towns and it a quite interesting. One was seen a quite dynamic and one that was seen to be quite set in its ways, you couldn't get anything done. You mapped the connections between people and they looked almost the same on paper. But it was attitude. Whether they were open, receptive to new ideas, whether they were allowing of new energy into the group but it was all those things that are very difficult to plan for or to train

FG1A

This participant echoed the importance of **People** and **Engagement** within the concept of resilience, but grounded it in a broader context: of community empowerment. That people are not merely permitted or given an opportunity by an organisation to be involved in or engaged with something. Rather, people are in the lead working in a collective manner on that which is important to them:

If we build a resilient voluntary and community sector that has been shaped by the citizens of the area empowering the community to have a say in what matters to them then I believe we have changed the balance. Informing from [the] community upwards in my mind is really important.

S7W

The suggestion here that a resilient voluntary sector is a 'by-product' from when communities are empowered to determine their own priorities and resourced to achieve them is an interesting

variation to the notion that investing in and focusing on the resilience of the voluntary sector will bring about a re-distribution of power.

It is worth noting that **Quality Assurance** and **Risk Management** were considered the least important indicators overall, but both trustees and volunteers tended to have a higher regard for both than workers do. Indeed, it was workers who had a far greater spread of ratings across the indicators, including some who regard **Quality Assurance** irrelevant, as well as **Sustainable Funding** and **Strategy** as quite unimportant.

Quality assurance can be difficult to assess and measure. And is often subjective so we obvs report to our funders, and obvs that needs to be timely and sufficient and must get their approval...but I don't know; QA is one of those jargony, doesn't really mean anything [terms]. Is it really measurable, who's doing it, that kind of thing,

FG3C

Very few charitable organisations have access to sustainable funding. Even social enterprises which generate their own income cannot guarantee that they will continue to do so. Some charities have regular income from legacies and the County Voluntary Associations receive regular Government funding, but in the main smaller charitable organisations rely on sources of funding which are far less certain.

FG7A

Sustainable funding is the one I would query because in this day and age I really don't see it being applicable to not-for-profits. I know we can get projects that can go for 3-5 years of funding, but to me sustainable funding means a longer term future than 3-5 yrs.

FG3B

The lukewarm attitude towards **Sustainable Funding** on the part of some might be surprising to some given the focus there's been on it in recent years in the sector. From what some others have observed perhaps it is reflective of a wider shift away from prevailing orthodoxies in terms of organisational planning. One chief officer of a voluntary organisation included attitudes towards, and the quest for, sustainable funding in a point broader point about planning; while another worker was dissatisfied with the term 'sustainable' because of its unattainability for most.

The traditional business plan doesn't work anymore. Nobody had Covid and the closure for 18 months [in their business plan]. But we had a plan that's a rolling six months but it takes time, expertise and you've got to hold on to your breaches in that type of environment

FG6D

If you want to re-badge [sustainable funding] as 'financial planning', you can do that. Successful or unsuccessful, you should have a component of financial planning. But doesn't always go to plan! But I totally agree with [FG3B] sustainable funding is just not a reality is it?

FG3C

The reference to funding was felt by some to unhelpfully focus on the availability of financial resource: grants, loans, contracts, rents and lets etc. Though not unimportant, for some it potentially draws attention away from the freedom and autonomy to use finance where it is best deployed (many participants referred to the unprecedented relaxing of restrictions on how to spend grants

during the pandemic) and from non-financial and less tangible forms of resource and asset. The favour disposed towards mentoring by several participants is reflective of this attitude too.

We are sympathetic to this from the point of view of the concept of social capital that promotes the value of strong, trustworthy relations and networks.

*Money is helpful of course. But for a sector so reliant on the power of volunteering it seems a bit of a blind spot to, unintentionally I'm sure, focus on funding. We need resources across the piece: volunteer effort, IT expertise, good relations with our councillors, somewhere nice to sit and have a chat. I know that is probably covered by **Networks [and Relationships]** but for me it just goes a bit deeper*

FGEB

We've been working on a programme in [our area] about building communities and it's not the physical assets, it's all their assets that FG5C was talking about: the people, the skills that they have, the resources that they have, yes the buildings, the green spaces, the parks, footpaths - all the things you'd have in a community. So we've been doing a lot of work around mapping what's in each community and who are the main players.

FG5A

Funding is essential for the organisation to move forward and how we use that to meet local needs. But it's not just having funding, we've got to have the flexibility within the funding to allow us to meet that need. We welcome funding but we don't want a call in January to say we've got an under-spend and can you spend it by March without actually using it for the work that needs to be done. It's got to be planned - this is the need - and try to get some additional flexibility in how that money is used.

FG4A

Very few additional comments were received, reflecting the broad, tacit approval of the indicators.

12. Current resilience practice

“The future is already here - it's just not very evenly distributed”

William Gibson, 1993

To be very clear this enquiry was not at any point an appraisal of *how* resilient the sector is.

Inevitably the pandemic loomed large over the enquiry in several ways. Some respondents were still dealing with specific and acute issues facing service users caused by the pandemic. Others were in the dark over the longer-term impact of the pandemic: budgets, where they would be working, strategic direction. But even in a practical day-to-day sense participation in the enquiry was affected by self-isolation requirements, particularly by those with school pupils in their household.

We asked a series of questions to respondents related to their and their organisations’ response to the pandemic; for their practical responses to the pandemic provided, potentially, an interesting, additional insight into resilience planning and response.

The choice to categorise trustees, workers and volunteers had further rationale here pertinent here because of the different perspectives – e.g., the trustee’s strategic, the volunteer’s ‘front of house’ – might offer differ insights *within* the same organisation or sub-sector.

These questions centred on demand for their services during the pandemic; the anticipated demand on services for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022; and any new or emerging collaborations and partnerships.

This section is split into two sub-sections:

- responses to date
- future planning and responses

The Ideas Bank picks up several of these in more practical detail.

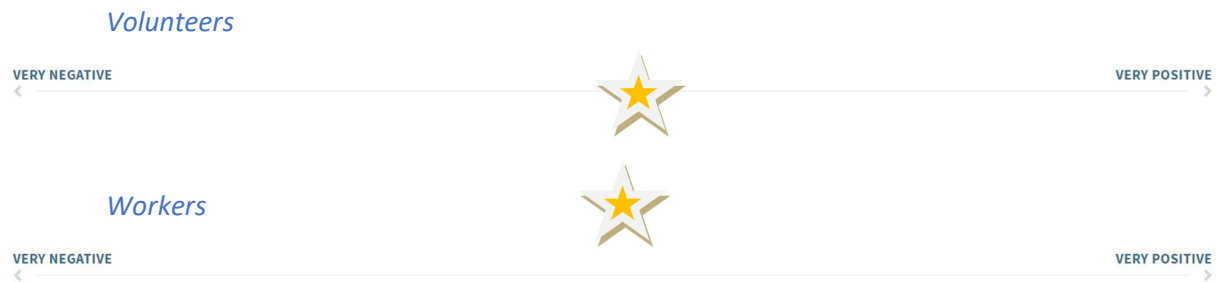
12.1. Response to date

To begin with, survey respondents were invited to rate on a value continuum from ‘Very negative (zero) to ‘Very positive’ (100) what they felt the impact of the pandemic had been on their organisation.

When we decided to include this question in the survey we were acutely mindful that we did not want to ‘rake over the coals’ of traumatic and difficult experiences related to, for example, illness, bereavement, redundancy or organisational closure. Respondents had the option to expand on why they rated the impact as they had and we did not intend to ‘dig’ any deeper than that.

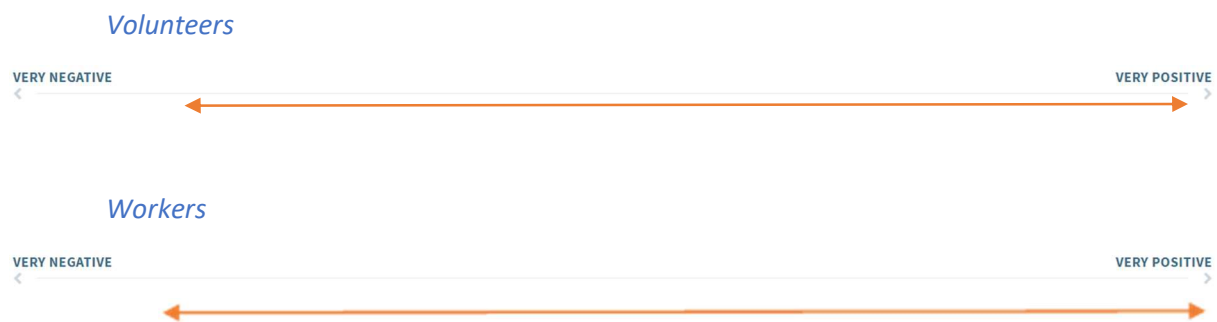
The average rating is shown below for each type of respondent except trustees none of whom answered this question:

Figure 6a – Impact of the pandemic on organisations (average of responses) according to:



Broadly the same, the spread of ratings was the same too with some respondents claiming the pandemic had been extremely positive, while some respondents suggested the impact had been negative.

Figure 6b – Impact of the pandemic on organisations (spread of responses) according to:



The positivity on the part of some surprises us somewhat. The pandemic disrupted previous ways of working that marginalised or excluded some (e.g., people with disabilities) and for these people the challenge post-pandemic was not returning to these old norms and assumptions with additional comments provided such as:

We had funding and engaged with almost 2000 people on zoom, learning as we went, gathering volunteers and skills as we went - it was a very good time for us

S4V

Increased profile and interest in our services and in volunteering for us

S19W

As I had my own health problems and had to step back, two of my main volunteers stepped up to ensure the service continued to operate, building their resilience and confidence, which has brought us closer as a team, and confident in our future as an organisation.

S5V

The organisation responded well to the pandemic and evidenced its ability to respond for the safety and wellbeing of all

S8W

The pandemic has brought people together more with more people looking to volunteer

S5W

Gave time for full restructuring and development of virtual/telephone befriending.

S3V

For some groups and organisations, actually, the pandemic was a lifeline...they were able to achieve things which they couldn't have achieved prior to the pandemic. I'll use the example of disability. Moving over to online working meant that a lot of disabled adults no longer had to negotiate sort of 3 hour, horrible public transport journeys to get to meetings, and could just switch on in the comfort of their own home. So they were able to reduce their pain medication to be able to participate. So and I think somewhere that needs to be acknowledged that actually, what was normal prior to the pandemic, wasn't working for everybody.

VTC3

Those for whom the pandemic was more harmful cited primarily the financial implications of it and the impact it had on volunteer numbers with those organisations working in health and wellbeing and arts appearing to retain volunteers with greater success.

Organisations working with refugees and/or asylum seekers and in traditional activities where a core facet is the bringing of people together physically, such as sports and youth work, appeared to fare less well:

We had a decline in volunteering by volunteer drivers as many were in vulnerable categories. As the office was closed, virtually all admin positions were suspended.

S13W

The pandemic has caused redundancies and cession of any meaningful planning. This standing on shifting sands has caused so much loss in people and opportunity.

S10W

We had a decline in volunteering by volunteer drivers as many were in vulnerable categories. As the office was closed, virtually all admin positions were suspended.

S13W

It's a resource issue that's led to [us] shedding staff and during the pandemic ending group support. We still haven't begun [at the time of the interview] that type of support throughout all of [name of area withheld]

IW2

Redundancies, lack of funding, lack of face to face activity

S20W

Mass loss of millions of pounds due to mass fund raisers being canceled [sic]

S10V

Based on participant responses the services that saw an increase in demand were primarily:

Services that experienced <i>increased</i> demand	Cited reason(s)
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People were more isolated and some service areas were under-resourced • People needed help with hospital discharge • Places were closed so people did not know where to turn • There was confusion, mixed and conflicting messages from different levels of government
Financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information and understanding [of benefits system] • Increased costs with families at home and job uncertainty • People needed help with basic skills and digital literacy
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting people's wellbeing due to isolation, intensity of the broader situation, stress from working at home mentally people felt drained • Uncharted areas of mental stress • For young people due to a lack of school support
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear - people simply did not want to go out and shop, and the bulk of my cohort were in the vulnerable category • Helping people access food
Reducing isolation, maintaining sociability and befriending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people shielding and unable to get out • People dying felt alone • Face to face online befriending sessions because residential and day care closed • group shopping trips • Zoom sessions to continue social contact and craft lessons
Women's refuge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families being isolated with known abusive partners • Coping with all the members of family being isolated at once in sometimes restricting conditions, • Reduction in support from extended family members

Particular words recurringly crop up – befriending, isolation, advocacy, advice, stress, financial. The table is not an exhaustive list but provides a flavour of what issues participants' organisations responded to during the lockdown phases of the pandemic.

In contrast the services that tended to see a decline are listed below and tend to centre on those collective, physical activities (dancing, luncheon clubs) and were restricted by the official public health guidelines.

Services that experienced <i>decreased</i> demand	Cited reason(s)
Advocacy in domestic settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people were more isolated and so not in communication with others and unable to voice their personal concerns
Support for people who speak English as a second language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of face to face meetings and demand for interpretation Services • Move to online contract Asylum seekers face digital poverty

Governance support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of organisations closed their doors and trustees took time out or were shielding themselves
Classes (skills, dance, language etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government covid restrictions prevented them
Face to face sociability activities, (e.g., luncheon clubs, shopping trips)	
Funding advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money was readily available for a lot of things • Advice wasn't required as longer term project and service planning largely stopped

12.2. Future planning and responses

Many respondents to the survey provided examples of their forward planning. Very few respondents expected demand for services to fall (except for facilities related services such as room hire, classroom teaching). Almost all respondents expected demand for support services to not just increase in terms of numbers wanting support, but to intensify in terms of the amount of support some individuals would need. There was reference too to complexity of support needs caused by the pandemic and its impact. Advocacy and mental health support were the most common services expected to be in demand.

Welfare benefit advice for disabled and older people, advocacy generally as people will struggle with adjusted and new systems in particular in health services

S3W

A stronger focus on targeted outreach work with communities who experience bias

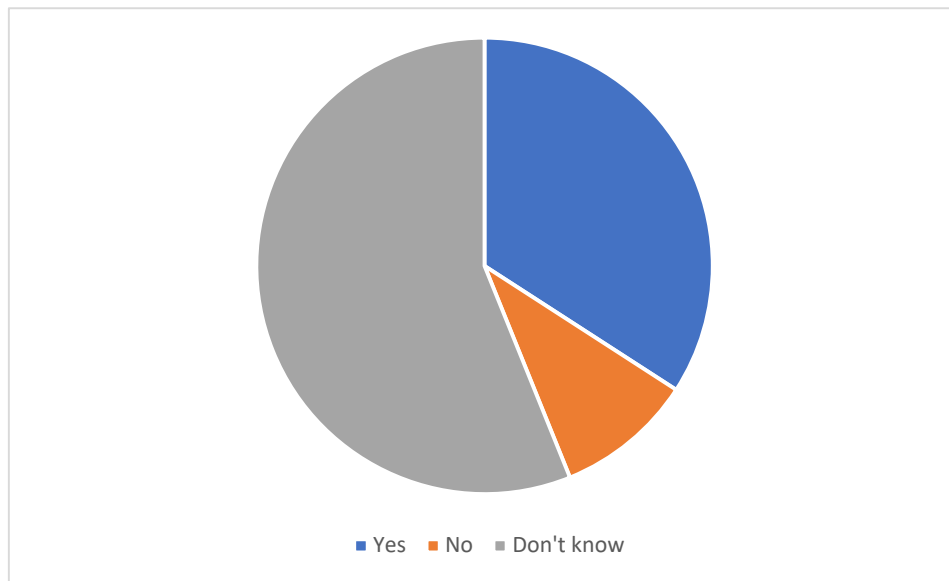
S14W

There was a broad recognition that organisations would have to undertake adaptations, remedial work and re-engage with communities and service users. But a large number of respondents were unable, or unwilling to, specify in any detail what these might entail.

Only 1 in 3 respondents could identify a new collaboration over service delivery and the overwhelming majority of these were horizontal collaborations, i.e., with other organisations of similar size and scope in the voluntary sector. Very few respondents cited any collaborations beyond the sector or vertically with partners operating at scales beyond the local, county or regional.

Despite the recognition of a collective responsibility in making the sector more resilient, there remains, based on respondents' experiences, much to do to foster greater collaborative working and building solidarities.

Figure 7 – Has your organisation begun, or is planning to begin, a new collaboration with another organisation over service delivery?



Partnership with other education and third sector organisation to redefine how we deliver our creative activities for some of the hardest to reach and most excluded communities

S14W

Other sensory loss charities working together to deliver on our particular strengths that make the overall offering complementary and stronger

S5W

We are working with several organisations to bring our services to a range of people. We cross post each others activities and work on small projects together

S4V

[We would] like to increase partnership with health board and other third sector partners. Also like to increase support for other smaller groups

S3W

Discussions with an organisation over the possible purchase of secure, permanent, larger premises which they have vacated, having built a larger building next door, and possible future working and use of their premises for events, as both parties reach out to the community

S5V

There was a concern that part of the post-pandemic recovery would feature a didactic or prescriptive form of training in 'how to be resilient':

The danger of this, is that at the end of this piece of work WCVA gets some money and it says 'Go off and train. Train the sector to be resilient. And it's totally up to you; we have no responsibility for this' [e.g.,] how the health board works, or the council relates to us

FG1A

If we train and control the voluntary sector - which we're in danger of doing - the whole point of the voluntary sector was people coming together wanting to meet a need that they'd identified, and the freedom to do that in the way they wanted to.

FG1B

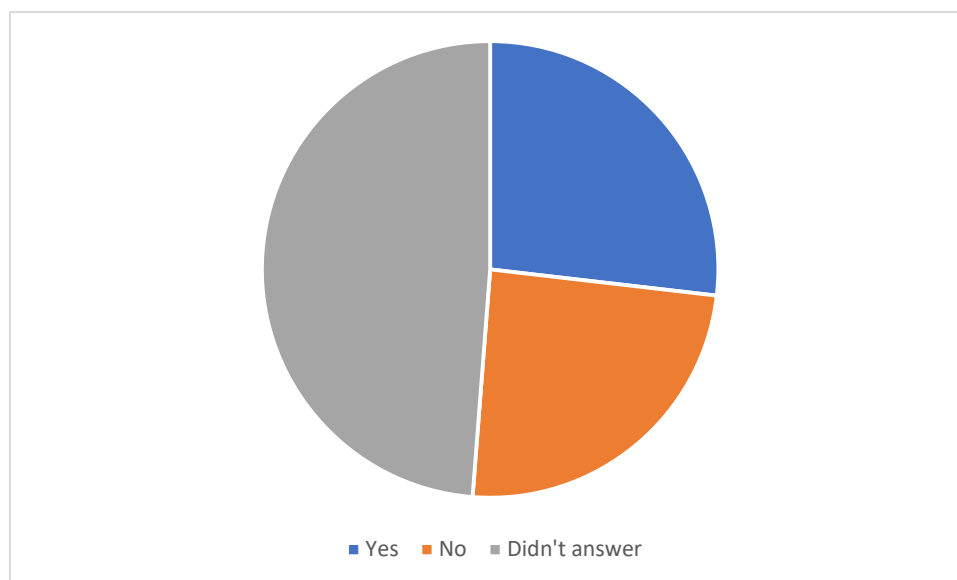
I'm keener that people are sent on co-production training, looking at the climate, and the environment in which every organisation is operating at the moment. Being asked to do more and more with less and less, I see much more value in WCVA pushing for people to do co-production training than resilience training

VTC3

One specific aspect of future planning we enquired about was the need for organisations to recruit volunteers and this was a mixed picture. Although many people did not answer the question in the survey, there was a broadly equal number of respondents who did need to replenish their pool while others felt they did not need to.

This cohort tended to cite the reason for this as either because they had recruited new volunteers during the pandemic and expect to retain them; because they had ceased specific activities or services during the pandemic and did not need volunteers for these; or, because they had redeployed volunteers into new roles.

[Figure 8](#) – Do you anticipate needing to recruit new volunteers to replace any that you have lost?



13. Resilience as collectivism

“You can change your life, I can change mine, together we can change the world around us”

Norman Peale, 1959

As pointed out, one specific element kept recurring throughout the enquiry: the notion of the voluntary sector as a *collective*.

Several participants referred to this collective not in an abstracted sense, i.e., knowing there is more like them ‘out there’, but in a more meaningful, connected, networked or collaborative sense. It strikes us – and this was tested in the Validation Through Consultation workshop – that there is something missing in the working definition and the underlying factors that pertains to the collective self.

The regard for mentoring is testament to this; as was the appetite to carry on the conversations beyond the focus groups that several participants expressed. The sharing of expertise and even volunteers – where one organisation had a surfeit of them during the pandemic – with counterparts all reflects cognisance of a collective self within the sector. Not everybody expressed this to the same degree (if they did so at all), but several participants recognised that on occasions, in some areas of the sector’s work, the sector can help *each other* with *each other’s resilience* (or flexibility or adaptability depending on one’s preferred terms) rather than each individual organisation inwardly looking at its own resilience.

When we talk about resilience, it's not only our organisation's resilience, it's about nurturing the ones who are the leaders to mentor others. And that's the bit for me we could look at especially in the rural settings.

FG6D

In the beginning there were so many people coming forward to offer time and for us we'd always been involved in a lot of formal volunteering roles because we knew the structure was there and we knew what was behind it. But for the first time [during covid] more of the informal stuff was coming in and I've seen a shift...The landscape we're in now, that's [volunteers] been a really good resource for me to share – really helpful.

FG4E

Isn't this something that can go further and we share and that we're all part of this wider social network where we've linked together today. It's been really lovely seeing you and meeting you and knowing that people are out there; but could that be something that WCVA facilitates so we're all doing it together?

FG5C

As demonstrated in the literature review, the concept of resistance is more overtly built on the foundation of solidarity and it is probably the biggest distinction between it and pre-covid concepts of resilience. The twelve indicators as they presently are tend to focus on what individual organisations can do to enhance their resilience. There is merit in this but the cognisance on the part of some

participants to a broader notion of collective resilience suggests that there may be merit in extrapolating these dozen indicators to a wider scale.

The extent to which this is possible will vary from factor to factor. Some lend themselves more to more overt notions of solidarity – e.g., **Networks and Relationships** or **People** – where a ‘traditional’ sense of collective strength is more recognisable. Or in the case of **Impact** where sector-wide metrics and standards can be negotiated.

Recognising the value of bringing networks together within communities is a variation on this theme of collective action. A community organiser in Porthcawl spoke of how the established networks that she was part of, or at least aware of, were a key part of their local response to issues the pandemic threw up (IWA, 2021). On their own though networks are of limited use. The same organiser is quick to point out the importance of **Leadership** within these networks and structures that allowed, in the grip of the pandemic, for order, planning and accountability to be maintained (ibid.).

Militating against the sense of the collective however are some indicators that might provoke or insulate more individualistic behaviours. **Sustainable Funding**, irksome to several participants, potentially pitches organisations in the sector in competition with one another. Commercial sensitivities may well militate against more collaborative models or positions grounded in solidarity for some organisations.

As organisations we are interdependent, just as people are. Yet competitive tendering encourages withholding information that might put us at a competitive advantage. It discourages collaboration and causes divisions. This threatens our resilience – where we need to learn from each other to support the people we support in the best possible ways

IW1

In the validation through consultation exercise a debate was had about the potential in the way the existing twelve indicators are presented to isolate **Good Governance** from **Sustainable Funding**. Having given an insight into how much of their workload during the pandemic was focused on remedial intervention and advice for struggling groups, participants in that exercise commented that the two areas are inextricably linked, sometimes complexly, and that in some cases an excessive focus or attention on funding can expose or aggravate problems of a governance nature. Or that the availability of funding obscures governance issues or, as in the case of the availability of ‘covid-monies’, provides a dis-incentive to address them.

Regularly we have groups come to us and say ‘help’. You know, we’ve tried to get funding from the lottery, or we’ve tried to get funding from somewhere. And we’ve been turned down again and again. And then when we look into it...quite a lot of the time, it can be because they don’t understand their own organisation. They don’t understand the governance of it. They don’t understand that they’re trying to act outside their powers, and trying to get funding for things that they know are important, they’ve identified are important, but actually, they haven’t got it within their governance structure

VTC2

*There’s often **governance** issues, not **funding** issues. And that’s the reason for their funding issues. It’s not always I agree that short term funding **is** detrimental to groups. And I say that, you know, especially through COVID, with all this short term funding sloshing around as money everywhere at the moment*

Innovation and Creativity can create commercial and competitive advantages, the maintenance of which can enhance the sustainability of an organisation's financial situation. The danger of organisations adopting protectionist positions on innovations and adaptations potentially militates against the sharing of learning, mentoring and building solidarities across the sector

As was pointed out by several participants, networks need facilitating and nurturing and don't 'just exist'. This takes time which, for some voluntary organisations, comes at a premium. As we have seen some have rejected the traditional approach to, or the received wisdom of, **Strategy** and business planning.

The experience of the last couple of years for some organisations involved in this enquiry, even pre-pandemic, was to reject complex, thoroughly compiled plans and to replace them with shorter mission documents that are more flexible to the challenges they face. One organisation who works with carers and young carers spoke more about their 'shared values' and making strategic and operational decisions in accordance with these.

It is clear then that these twelve indicators are inter-connected. That they cannot be honed or appraised either on an individual organisational basis or more collectively in isolation from each other.

For instance, the desire or need to further embrace **Innovation and Creativity**, and to be more adaptive and flexible makes demands on **Strategy**. Anyone who has been through a change process will testify to the difficulties in bringing **People** along with that process in an active, participative and transparent manner. **Innovation** therefore can place great strain on how an organisation **Communicates and Engages** with its service users, members and partners.

The interplay between these indicators, we believe, merits clear and honest communication to the sector. They will almost constantly be in a state of flux and with inherent tensions within and between them. This re-enforces the notion of resilience as less a goal or target, but a process of continued adaptation, negotiation, compromise and refinement.

We think there is merit in adding a thirteenth factor, one which has the potential to strengthen collective identity and build solidarities through the transfer of knowledge: a commitment to **Shared Learning**.

It encompasses a commitment to share the learning that organisations undertake individually, as well as a commitment to learning in a collaborative and communal sense too. We believe this has the potential for enhancing the sector's ability to adapt and innovate. A commitment to **Shared Learning** would not just help organisations learn about how to enhance the individual indicators that contribute to resilience – e.g., how to manage risk, or how to shape their strategy – but to learn from one another about how changes and adaptations to indicators impacts on others.

One of the groups I run, we don't receive any funding from anywhere. And it's wholly voluntary. And some of the things we do that makes sure that we sort of survive, adapt all the rest of it, is about skill sharing, paying it forward. If one person learns how to do something, they teach the next person coming behind them, so that if we lose a volunteer, who's very skilled, we don't lose all the talent, and knowledge and everything that came with them. [because] I've seen that affect organisations

14. Our thirteen insights for resilience

“We are not what we know but what we are willing to learn”

Mary Catherine Bateson, 2004

We have distilled what participants have said in the course of this enquiry down to thirteen insights and invite WCVA and the wider voluntary sector in Wales to consider them. We believe those outside the sector too should heed these insights too: local government, Welsh Government, the UK government, and wider civil society.

By doing so we believe this work has scope to inform ongoing post-pandemic recovery plans, programmes and funding.

1. WCVA’s draft definition of voluntary sector resilience is broadly accepted by the organisations that participated in the research, and a definition of resilience is widely considered helpful.
2. Participants wanted funders and government to recognise, in both their actions and decisions, that they can greatly affect the sector’s resilience positively or negatively.
3. There are different conceptions of resilience within the sector. For some, resilience is a term with a settled, accepted specific definition; while for others it is less clearly defined.
4. There are some in the sector who reject the concept of resilience altogether and argue that it potentially patronises or obfuscates wider inequalities and forms of oppression, and this critique needs to be heard by those using the term.
5. It is not enough for voluntary organisations to focus solely on their own organisational resilience, but they should recognise that building solidarities can further enhance collective and mutual resilience across the sector.
6. Resilience is not a goal to strive for; nor a state that, once attained, is retained. It is more fluid, requiring regular – even constant – adaptations and flexible responses.
7. There needs to be recognition that those factors that some believe shape organisational resilience should not be considered in isolation, e.g., ‘sustainable funding’. Undertaking

changes in one area may well bring about a need for changes elsewhere, either positively or negatively.

- 8.** *A commitment to shared learning* - by being prepared to both share their reflective learning and to learn collaboratively with others, organisations can grow the sector's collective resilience by being able to better adapt, respond and, when appropriate, resist adversity.
- 9.** If narratives around resilience are possibly being used to manipulate, undermine, or marginalise the sector, then some consider that adopting individual and collective positions of resistance will best serve the sector's interests.
- 10.** Situations when the sector finds itself under extreme stress ('crises') need not be sudden nor unexpected. Adversity can sometimes emerge slowly and in plain sight.
- 11.** Debates about resilience need to include discussion of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, its Goals and Ways of Working.
- 12.** Organisations needs to accept that there will be times when you, your team, your organisation, perhaps the wider sector, will not *feel* resilient. It is ok to ask for help.
- 13.** The sector wants to remain engaged with debates – from the conceptual to the practical – around the concept of resilience. It is not a static concept, nor one that will be universally accepted, and collective debate is part of a wider learning culture.

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Appendix 1 - Grow Social Capital CIC director profiles

Andy Green

Andy Green is a specialist in innovation and creativity, social capital, storytelling and strategic communications developing new ideas and tools to transform how to engage and create communities of social changemakers.

He is the author of seven books on creativity, brand storytelling and social capital – translated into eight languages. Andy works to break down barriers to transformational change to enable people and teams to make the most of their potential and their situations and has delivered projects around the globe including in Australia, Austria, China, Egypt, France, Gambia, Ghana, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Norway, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Uganda and the United States.

Andy is a Fellow of the CIPR and RSA and is a founder supporter of the Dublin Conversations

Sarah Tamsin

Sarah is a freelance website consultant and content creator from south Wales.

She has spent over 15 years working on various digital projects in the voluntary sector and Local Government before launching her freelance career.

Starting her online business initially as a side hustle, Sarah also developed a network of successful websites and blogs using SEO, Pinterest and Social Media to drive traffic, she then monetised this content using affiliate marketing, brand partnerships and selling digital products.

Matt Appleby

Matt is a strategic communications consultant, working with organisations to develop and embed social purpose, and share the positive impact they can have on people and places.

He started his career in PR and, as managing director of one of Wales' largest integrated agencies for nearly 10 years, Matt represented many of Wales' highest-profile businesses and organisations.

Matt left agency life to join Business in the Community Cymru, running the Prince's Responsible Business Network in Wales for three years, before setting up Matt Appleby Consulting in September 2019.

Matt is a Fellow of the CIPR, was Wales' first CIPR Chartered PR Practitioner and is co-author of three CIPR PR handbooks on social media. He is an RSA Fellow and a member of the PRCA and IPSE.

Russell Todd

Russell is a freelance community development practitioner, researcher and consultant with 20+ years' experience working in and with communities in Wales. He is also a founding director of Valleys Ale Trails and the football social enterprise Expo'r Wal Goch.

Russell is also a podcaster and podcast producer and founded the first podcasts dedicated to the Wales football team and community development practice.

Appendix 2 – our facilitators

In addition to Grow Social Capital staff, the following acted as facilitators of focus groups. All acted in freelance capacities unless stated.

Allan Herbert (Disability CanDo)

Mymuna Soleman

Gwion Wyn Jones

Dr Jan Huyton

Janine Cusworth

Marguerite Lovegrove

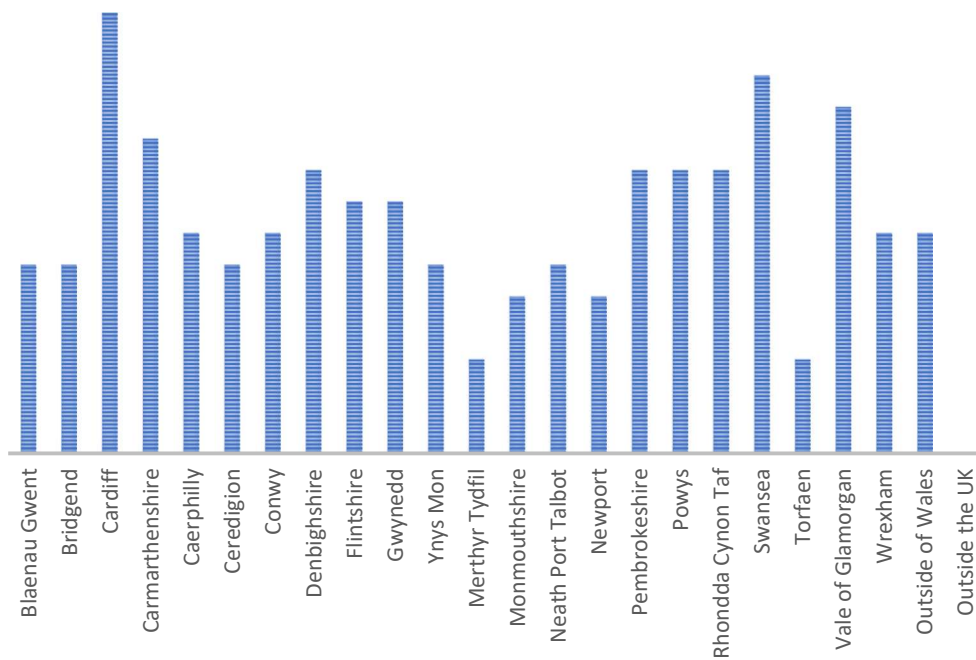
Jenny O’Hara (Credú)

Dr Liz Bickerton

Leandra Craine (Disability Wales)

Appendix 3 – location of respondents

Figure 9 – the locations in which respondents' organisations operate



Respondents were drawn from organisations operating in each of Wales's 22 local authorities including a small number of individuals whose remits took them outside of Wales.

No participant worked outside the UK or overseas for a Wales-based organisation.

Valleys authorities, particularly those covering the Heads of the Valleys, were under-represented overall, as was Newport.

Appendix 4 – WCVA’s twelve indicators of resilience

1. PURPOSE

There is a clearly articulated purpose which is shared and understood across the organisation and communicated externally:

- The purpose is clear to anyone who engages with the organisation, e.g, on website, social media
- The mission/plans are informed by the purpose
- All the organisation’s activities are in line with the purpose

2. STRATEGY

The organisation has a strategy, or a plan in place, or at least has a clear strategic direction to provide focus for its work.

- There is a written strategy/plan(s)
- There is a system in place for monitoring progress against the strategy/plan(s)
- The strategy/plan(s) is shared and communicated internally

3. IMPACT

The organisation understands the impact (or difference) it is trying to achieve, has an approach to measuring that impact, and is able to communicate it both internally and externally.

- The organisation’s goals are communicated internally and externally
- Activities are monitored and evaluated to support continuous improvement
- A system is in place for reporting on the organisation’s impact and learning from any findings

4. LEADERSHIP

The organisation’s leaders (board and senior staff as applicable) provide support and direction, and enable a healthy, inclusive culture.

- The board provides leadership and strategic direction for the organisation
- If the organisation has staff, the senior team have the skills and confidence to lead the day-to-day operations and support other staff and volunteers
- Staff and volunteers are empowered to show leadership to an appropriate level within their roles and are supported to develop within their roles
- The board and staff work together to foster a positive, inclusive culture which values diversity

5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

There are systems and processes in place to ensure that the organisation is well-governed and accountable for what it does.

- There is an effective board/management committee who understand their role and responsibilities
- The board provides direction, support, scrutiny and oversight for the organisation

- There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to support good governance

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

There is an approach in place to monitor and provide assurance in relation to the quality of the organisation's activities and services, which could include undertaking recognised quality marks and systems, if appropriate.

- The organisation is aware of the importance of quality assurance, especially when delivering services
- There is an approach to assessing the quality of the organisation's activities and services
- The organisation undertakes recognised quality standards or marks (if appropriate)

7. PEOPLE

The organisation has the people (board, staff, volunteers as applicable) with the right skills, knowledge and experience to deliver against its purpose and the capacity to manage and support them appropriately.

- The board carries out skills audits and there is a robust approach to trustee recruitment and induction
- Staff and volunteers are recruited in line with good practice and the law and receive appropriate training and supervision
- The organisation is committed to equal opportunities and seeks to encourage diversity at all levels

8. SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

The organisation has the right amount and mixture of funding to carry out its purposes, and a plan is in place for sustaining or growing funding across income streams.

- The organisation has, or aims to develop, a mixture of income streams and is not overly reliant on one stream
- There is a sustainable income generation plan in place
- There is a business plan in place

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

The organisation has a proactive approach to risk management that identifies risks and takes steps to mitigate them.

- There is a risk register in place which is monitored and regularly updated
- The board and senior team (if applicable) are not overly risk averse, but have a healthy approach to risk, seeking advice where appropriate
- The organisation has, or aims to have, an appropriate level of reserves to cover core costs for an identified period of time should there be a reduction in income

10. INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

The organisation is willing to change and respond to what is happening, can evolve to meet its beneficiaries' needs and takes a creative approach to delivery and problem solving.

- The organisation has, or is developing, its digital infrastructure
- The organisation's services are responsive to need and can adapt to changes in the external environment
- The organisation is willing to explore ideas and trial new approaches to delivery

11. NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The organisation works in partnership with others and/or engages with relevant networks or is willing to do.

- The organisation understands the environment and sub sector in which it operates
- The organisation seeks out appropriate partnerships and collaborations with other organisations
- The organisation is linked in with relevant networks and membership bodies

12. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The organisation is able to communicate what it does to its beneficiaries, funders, donors and stakeholders and has a proactive approach to engagement.

- The organisation has a communications plan which is in line with its purpose and strategy, and includes a clear case for support
- The organisation places beneficiaries at the heart of its communication and engagement activities and there are mechanisms to ensure their voices are heard
- The organisation has appropriate and consistent external communication channels e.g., website, social media, newsletters

Appendix 5 – Ideas Bank

Grow Social Capital proposed using the opportunities presented by this research project to explore developing the idea of an IdeasBank. This could act as both a repository for individual ideas and as a platform to encourage further insights and ideas.

Participants in the project were contacted to provide ideas for building organizational resilience. Broad issues were captured using post-it notes (see figure 10). From this exploration some key insights emerge around:

1. ‘Online awakening’ (to realise its greater potential)/Achilles’ heel (Where you need to be mindful of critical shortcomings)
2. Teamwork and community partnerships critical
3. Need for flexible planning – systems can only be robust if flexible
4. Wellbeing more to the fore of everyday thinking
5. Need for a more supportive wider community

Figure 10 – example of Ideas Bank engagement with the voluntary sector in Wales



Practical actions undertaken by organisations due to the pandemic have been ‘deposited’ into the **Ideas Bank**. The aim is for other organisations in the sector to make ‘withdrawals’ of ideas to implement where appropriate, in their own setting and context, and to generate reciprocity in the sector – a crucial component in building social capital – by making their own deposits. This helps a reserve of ideas builds up.

The Ideas Bank work will carry on beyond the end of this enquiry but a flavour of the first ‘deposits’ is found below.

Example of Ideas Bank content

Organisation	Date	Action taken	Why	Impact to date	Contact
Name withheld ¹⁵	Aug 2021	Recruited two young people as trustees	To ensure our responsiveness to and understanding of the needs of young people post-pandemic are better informed	<i>To be completed</i>	To be contacted via Grow Social Capital

The use of Randomised Coffee Trials in the enquiry is explained in [section 3](#). We think there is merit in continuing to use such a method to stimulate new insights around the issue of organisational resilience. Grow Social Capital is developing this idea to provide an ongoing learning-centred exchange that complements the Ideas Bank.

[graphic to follow]

¹⁵ This organisation is cited in the report and to maintain anonymity the name is withheld here. It can be contacted via Grow Social Capital