University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Society Inc
Mentoring and Befriending
in Salford

Evaluation Report

Society Inc.

(June 2020)

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"Why I do this, because I brought myself up from the age of 8…, I watched my dad go from a hardworking man to an alcoholic. I volunteer here and at other organisations, because these places, where a lot of people have been, I've been there as well, and I know what it feels like. There is nothing worse than someone being stuck out there without help." (Ian, Society Inc. Volunteer).

"I had a really bad episode last year where I almost took me own life and it's kind of scared me…. I had therapy, but I needed help where I could get out and someone that I could trust and talk to. (Diane, Society Inc. Client).

"From the first time I did the training I was just hooked, and I knew it was where I wanted to be, what I wanted to do." (Julie, Society Inc. Volunteer).

Acknowledgement

Thank you to everyone who kindly gave their time to contribute to the learning gained during this evaluation.

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Executive Summary

People and relationships are central to what constitutes Society Inc. Their model is founded on three broad aims, social inclusion, empowerment and support. This evaluation report demonstrates how Society Inc. enables local people to use and develop their skills and knowledge to support others within their community. Their model is rooted in the belief that every person is of value to their community.

Adopting a person-centred approach is not uncommon. However, it is *how* Society Inc. practice what they preach, which ensures their clients, volunteers and staff, reliably experience being valued as a person. The charity's outcomes are embodied in the experience of social inclusion and belongingness. Accordingly, the development of this evaluation has been inductive, to allow that experience to emerge.

The information shared in this report is based on interviews with clients, their family members, volunteers and staff. In the process of conducting interviews, I attended the charity's base in Little Hulton and observed interactions. I have been privileged to hear personal experiences and trusted to hold a shared understanding of 'knowing' how Society Inc. is experienced, and why that is of value.

Society Inc. is a charitable incorporated organisation that supports volunteers to provide mentoring and befriending services to people in their communities. It is based in the Little Hulton area of Salford and operates across Greater Manchester. In the relatively short time, Society Inc. has been operating it has become a point of referral for several organisations, including Salford Royal Hospital and Prescott House Mental Health Unit.

The charity often receives referrals to assist individuals who are already in receipt of a professional service. Engagement with Society Inc. provides the community-based support to actively assist people in the process of addressing their complex needs. Without undermining their personal touch, professionalism is at the heart of all Society Inc. practices. Notably, to support their staff and volunteers they deliver an accredited training scheme and facilitate reliable supervision and safeguarding procedures.

All interviewees reflect a sense of pride in their participation with, and knowledge of Society Inc. An emergent theme was about *being local*, but this was not simply a matter of location. For example, one client described other services such as Sure Start as procedural rather than helpful; there was a sense of feeling 'othered', that created anxiety. Closer analysis suggests that engagement with Society Inc. is experienced as the acceptance of a person's vulnerability, without judgement. That concept is the foundation of trust.

Additionally, the authentic discourses from staff and volunteers embraced language, which was often non-professionalised and indicative of their approach to inclusion as one that

engenders equality. That is of crucial importance when reducing barriers to inclusion experienced by those who live in areas of multiple deprivations, such as Little Hulton. It is within a landscape of decades of economic, social, health and education inequality, that Society Inc. practices

The volunteers who provide mentoring and befriending services are the conduit between Society Inc. as an organisation, and those who engage with its services. Indeed, some who approach the charity with a view of receiving support might soon discover the support they need could be in the form of becoming a mentor or befriender to someone else. Two people who started as volunteers are now employed by the charity, through its ability to attract funding. Society Inc. runs on a financial shoestring, yet it is able to provide a service and nurture ambition within the community that for many, is worth its weight in gold.

Reducing social isolation is a foundational Society Inc. activity. Volunteers seek to encourage their clients to safely experience the world around them, as a means to disrupt feelings of loneliness and to nurture a greater sense of self-efficacy, belongingness and enjoyment. This active approach supports clients to go beyond pre-contemplation to active engagement with change.

The trusted relationships facilitated by Society Inc. and experienced within their social network of support was implicit in all participant interviews. Particularly striking, was the belief that Society Inc. could be trusted to continue

to be available to meet the future needs of people who require their services. That sense of permanence indicates a perception of strength in the social network they have created, which extends beyond the individuals who are current volunteers.

Society Inc. has responded effectively to the changing needs of its clients and volunteers during the Covid19 pandemic and associated social restrictions. They quickly adapted to further develop their networking activities with other local organisations. This was important, as the government imposed social distancing measures can inhibit people from seeking support.

Impressively, Society Inc. was proactive in developing communication links with other charities and services to streamline delivery and ensure they were not duplicating their activities. They adapted their usual community-based support systems to telephone communications. Recognising that some people's mental well-being required the ability to see and talk to someone, they conducted some social distancing visits at the garden gate. In addition to these strategies, the staff have been mobilised to respond to those members of the community in urgent need of food.

A constant throughout the evaluation process was the importance of highlighting the value of those who are receiving and delivering Society Inc. services. That foundational premise remained consistent, especially during this time of critical and acute need.

Introduction

Society Inc. was founded in 2017 as a constituted group, with a specific focus on the needs of people living in the Little Hulton area of Salford. In January 2019, it registered as a charitable incorporated organisation and extended its attention to meet needs across Greater Manchester. Society Inc. has five Trustees, Joanne Bonney, Victoria Fletcher-Simm, Mike Lappin and Josephine Nicklin. Additionally, Karen Whitehead, who founded Society Inc is a Trustee and acts as the Chief Executive Officer.

People and relationships are central to what constitutes Society Inc. Their model is founded on three broad aims, social inclusion, empowerment and support. Their success has enabled two of their volunteers Alison Gresty and Nicola Leonard, to become employed as operational support workers who assist both clients, and volunteers.

As an organisation, Society Inc. facilitates volunteers to act as mentors and befrienders to help foster and improve personal and social relationships. In turn, these activities help to reduce social isolation and anti-social behaviour while also improving mental and physical health, well-being and education (Brown & Rook, 2019). Society Inc.'s mantra is, *'Connection before Correction'.*

The charity distinguishes between their mentoring and befriending services. The mentoring service can be both formal and informal, with activities being tailored to individual needs with a specific outcome negotiated between the mentor and their mentee. The mentor relationships can be for a specific duration and focus. For example, to help someone find employment. The data from this evaluation is supported by research which demonstrates that mentoring can have positive effects on the mental health of both mentors and mentees (Chun, et al., 2012; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Gill, et al., 2018).

Their befriending service is designed to support people who experience loneliness and social isolation. These can be long-term relationships, which are not necessarily driven by specific goal orientated outcomes. Voluntary befriending schemes have also been found to have positive benefits for adults and families (Gentry at al., 2018; McGoldrick, et al., 2017; Preston & Moore, 2019; Vally & Abrahams, 2016). However, unlike similar services, Society Inc. provision is not limited by age, (anyone over the age of 18 years can be referred) or need.

All volunteers are trained both as mentors and befrienders. Participants described a permeability in their delivery that adapts to the changing needs of the client, who may experience both aspects of the service. This flexibility is important for people whose mental health needs can negatively affect their individual, health, education, relational, economic and societal wellbeing (Davies, 2013; de Vries et al., 2019; Prior et al., 2013).

The charity is based in an area of Salford with some of the highest forms of deprivation in the country. As one of ten local authorities within Greater Manchester, Salford is the third most deprived. Furthermore, Little Hulton is itself one of the most deprived areas of Salford. Worryingly, this need is present when local authority provision is in decline, and there is continued concern about the health deprivation across the city.

The next section of this report will add greater detail to the context of need that Society Inc. operates within. It was the greater visibility of need that motivated Karen Whitehead to form Society Inc. Her family roots and childhood in Little Hulton provided traditional knowledge that enabled her to see the area, beyond its multifaceted deprivation towards the rich potential of those in the community. In brief, she recognised their value and wanted to assist how they could realise their potential.

This evaluation used experiential evidence to demonstrate how Society Inc. contributes to the development of social inclusion as they enable local people to support others in their community and facilitate local communities to support each other. The use of semi-structured interviews both in person and on the telephone was ethically approved by the University of Salford Ethics Committee. In-depth interviews facilitate detailed narratives which allow participants to share a broad range of perceptions (Creswell, 2012).

The evaluation took place prior to and during the UK government response to the COVID-19 pandemic which imposed

social distancing measures and removed many of the usual operating methods of befriending and mentoring. However, Society Inc. demonstrates how they were able to quickly adapt to not only the rapidly changing social environment but also to the increased and acute needs of their clients.

The context of social need

Society Inc. originated in the Little Hulton area of Salford and its services now extend across the Greater Manchester region. Nevertheless, the roots of its origin remain an important part of its identity and ethos. Little Hulton has a proud coal mining and textile industry heritage. However, in the last decade, it has experienced significant levels of long-term unemployment. Government ward data depicts long term unemployment in Little Hulton as 39.3% of total unemployment. That figure is a cause of concern, as multiple exposures of unemployment across time can contribute to the accumulation of poor mental health (Strandh et al., 2014).

In 2012, the Mental Health Task Force identified that every year, 1 in 4 of us are affected by a mental health need (NHS Digital, 2016; NHS England, 2013). These figures can rise for people who identify with a minority population (including but not exclusive to) people with Black and Asian heritage backgrounds, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual identities, young people, asylum seekers, refugees and armed service veterans (Pandor et al., 2015). Recent population demographics from the government ward profile, show 9% of Little Hulton residents identifying as

members of the Black and Ethnic Minority community.

The Salford City Partnership's Mental Health All Age Integrated Commissioning Strategy 2019-2024, has a focus on emotional wellbeing and mental health across the lifespan. In addition to a focus on mental health needs, the strategy recognised the need to support carers. Notably, Little Hulton has a particularly high proportion of carers aged between 55 and 64 years (15.8%). The new Salford Carer's Strategy recognised that carers who support people with mental health needs can also experience social isolation. However, it was often younger people aged 16-34 years who felt lonely and experienced a lack of trust and belongingness within their community.

Poor mental health is also associated with the experience of deprivation (Mishra, 2015). The index of multiple deprivations (2015; 2019) in Salford, reports Little Hulton as the city's second most deprived ward. Educationally, some areas of Little Hulton are amongst the 1-3% of most deprived in England. The index also examined health and disability deprivation, which include years of potential life lost, comparative illness and disability, mood and anxiety. Based on that criteria, Little Hulton has areas that fall into the 1-3% of the most deprived in England.

Regrettably, housing services have also seen a further decline with Salford being ranked 218th out of 317 local authorities. Little Hulton is deemed to have moderate areas of housing deprivation. Income deprivation affecting children and older people remain high in

Little Hulton. Some children living in Little Hulton are among the most deprived in the country.

The life expectancy for older people in Salford has not increased in line with those elsewhere in the country. Social isolation is a factor which can increase the risk of death for both older, and other vulnerable people. To combat this Salford's locality plan aims to develop strategies for self-care and to develop resilient communities. Society Inc. is a much-needed resource that can help put those policies into practice.

Society Inc. is a concept conceived within the Little Hulton community. The people who deliver and receive services are embedded in the harsh realities of deprivation. However, their collective skill, knowledge and authentic personification of resilience, enable this small charity to have an impressive reach. Its success is rooted in the embodiment of its values in every activity it undertakes.

The charity recognised and nurtured the development of people's skills and knowledge, both in ways which are understated, and accredited. This forms the basis of their foundation to build what is often termed 'social capital'. However, not a model of social capital, driven by economic benefit, but one motivated by social relations and cohesion which are embedded in the development of individuals, and intertwined with their community.

The descriptions of participant experiences, included within this report, provide evidence to support the four ways in which the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conceive and measure the concept of 'social capital'. Including personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement and trust and cooperative norms.

However, this evaluation highlights how Society Inc. extends beyond the limits of economic drivers. Their motivations are culturally shared and embodied in a sense of belonging that facilitates trust-based relationships. The context of social need detailed above can lead people to lack trust in others and limit their social participation within and beyond their neighbourhood (Stephens, 2008). Social inclusion is the experience of feeling valued within society and that is crucial to the development of cohesive communities (Colley, 2003).

"They are there, and not just there, but are attached because they see the place as a chance to practice a simple principle." (Raffel, 2006)

Empowering Social Inclusion

A foundational stone of Society Inc.'s structure is the promotion of social inclusion. A belief that being included as a valued member of the community 'creates a sense of ownership and loyalty'. Their belief is supported by research evidence. A recent study undertaken by Brown & Rook (2019) suggests positive
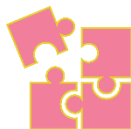
social ties increase community activity, which in turn was associated with health benefits.

During this evaluation, every participant shared a desire to make a difference in their community. Their narratives reflect an intrinsic motivation to want to help others succeed, and by their actions, they reflect on their development and learning (Mucedola, 2018). Several respondents had previously volunteered for other organisations or they were doing so concurrently or planned to do so, in the future.

The activity of volunteering being associated with good psychological health outcomes is well established (Anderson et al., 2014). More recently, an analysis of mental health data relating to depressive symptoms of 27,301 participants, from 15 European countries including the UK, suggest the benefit to mental health could be realised from the experience of social connectedness, than the act of volunteering, itself (Creaven, et al., 2018).

Authentic Personal Relationships

Developing personal relationships is a cornerstone of what Society Inc. facilitates. These relationships are centred on the needs of both the mentored and the mentee. The relationships are structured and professional while maintaining and promoting individual agency and ways of being. Those who provide mentoring and befriending services are the conduit between Society Inc. as an organisation and those who engage with its services.

Two people who joined Society Inc. as volunteers are now employed by the charity, which was enabled by its ability to attract funding. These operational support staff undertake an initial meeting with people who contact the charity and form a view of how they can help meet their needs. However, they are always mindful of empowering others and of how their very assistance could, if incorrectly delivered, serve to disempower the client.

Thus, authentic personal relationships are maintained by a process of ongoing critical self-reflection. That procedure is maintained by both a supervisory, and client-led process. Notably, this combination of skilled facilitators working alongside participatory group members is highly valued within groups (Fieldhouse et al., 2017).

> You might be intervening on people's lives, who know how to do it better than you. It comes from an egotistical point of view to think you can help someone. So, when you do strip it down, you think am I actually helping, because there's only the client who can guide you through that?

The flattening of any hierarchy is important to communication upon which we develop social relationships (Brailey, 2018). The inclusion experienced by participants was evidenced in several ways, as they described their interactions with others

at Society Inc. One striking means by which their inclusive approach is visible, is how people can approach the charity with a view to becoming a volunteer, or to ask for support. That concept could help reduce any stigma that might be experienced when first approaching the charity. Several participants revealed the act of volunteering could itself be the form of support that is needed.

> People walk in who have heard about us who say they want support, and by the end of a conversation they walk out as a volunteer. Or vice versa. We have people who say they want to volunteer when they could do with support.

If it is decided that someone would benefit from either befriending or mentoring, one of the operational support staff will approach a volunteer whom they think could be a good match. These initial decisions taken by staff are based on the trusting relationships they have developed with the volunteers. But the decision-making is shared, and there is an implicit sense of trust in the judgement of staff members, conveyed by the volunteers. A sense the staff know them and the basis on which they might relate to others.

> Your mentoring is matched up to who you are, and what you can do. What we might have in common.

The volunteers are also provided with a choice in who they might mentor or befriend. They have an opportunity to hear about the client, their needs and interests. This process enables them to form their own initial view, before deciding if they would like to be introduced. The shared decision-making process supports the volunteer's identity and can increase their motivation to continue (Cheung et al., 2015).

> They don't just land people on you. They get you in and they say to you, 'we've got this client, blah blah blah. How do you feel about it?'

Empowerment is fundamental to all aspects of Society Inc. practices. Throughout interviews, there was a shared and individual sense of what each person contributes to the whole. That included everyone who might initially become engaged with Society Inc. as a client or as a volunteer. Cui et al., (2019) suggest client empowerment includes self-efficacy, a belief in one's ability. That approach is fundamental to how Society Inc. operates.

> A lot of clients when they come to us, they know what they want to do they just don't have the courage to step forward and they just want someone to say 'yeah, you're doing the right thing'. A lot of them do know what they're doing they are just not quite sure how to get to that goal. So, it's about empowering them and giving them that knowledge.

Once a prospective match between a volunteer and a client has been decided, a three-way meeting is convened between them, and supported by one of the operational staff. However, the final choice of whether to continue further remains in the power of the person who would receive a service.

> I tend to leave it then to that person to see if they want me to mentor them, whether they think I'm right for them. It's no good me saying well you're right for me.

Importantly, if the relationship between the volunteer and the client is not successful, another volunteer can take their place.

> I met someone last week and he wasn't engaging well with the last person, so I met him, and we got on quite well, we had things in common that we were able to talk about.

The relationships between mentors and mentees are usually goal led. However, there is the flexibility to decide how long support might need to be available. Within Society Inc. the roles of mentoring and befriending are permeable and can adapt to the changing needs of Society Inc. clients.

> If someone says they are isolated, I would put in the befriending bracket and if they have a goal, then a mentor bracket. Our volunteers are trained in both. I think clients can slip into one and then the other, they might need a friend but then later have a goal they want to achieve.

The need-led approach ensures the client is valued and demonstrates how Society Inc. strives to resist potential barriers to inclusion. Additionally, there is no expectation of the length of engagement when deciding whether a service can be offered.

> We will be with that client as long as we need to be. If a client comes for one occasion and then not for three months, we don't turn them away.

Of equal importance, is how volunteers experience a sense of being valued and of empowerment. Society Inc. can support their volunteers as they have skilled employed staff who can be reliably present to meet the needs of both volunteers and clients. Knowing this implicitly permits volunteers to not feel burdened (Fieldhouse et al., 2017).

> Society Inc are quite flexible too. I can volunteer at times when I am available, so I don't feel pressured to do it. I have control over what hours I do, and what days I do.

Social networks that support equality

Social networks are comprised of people and the resources they represent and those which are available to them. Society Inc. has secured some external funding which has provided a physical base where people can simply walk in and self-refer. Funding is important to ensure there is a core availability of employed staff, so there is a person present to greet them.

In addition to their physical accessibility, Society Inc. further remove potential barriers to inclusion in the way they are present. The language used by all participants is one that echoes the entwining of personal and social. Notably, their authentic discourses, the way they speak, embraced language, which is often non-professionalised and indicative of their approach to inclusion as one that engenders equality (France, 2010).

> We're constantly busy we get clients dropping in and client's family dropping in. We have an open-door policy, if that door is open, come in and have a brew.

Importantly, their informality is carefully crafted and does not belie the professionalism that underpins their practice. Throughout every participant interview, there were indications of good evidenced-based practice. In particular, the provision of training and supervision is key to the development of a reliable social network that supports equable personal relationships. This report will address the

contribution of training in a later section, but the following extract reflects the importance of supervision for volunteers, facilitated by the skilled help of operational staff (Fieldhouse et al., 2017). It is important to remember, that mentoring, and befriending can be inspired by those who have experienced vulnerability. Their contribution benefits from access to a reliable support network.

Most of the participants who volunteered reflect on their own experience of vulnerability. Several respondents report their negative life events prompted them to want to support others.

> I've been bullied at school and that. I just want to help people get through similar situations that I've been through.

Society Inc. structures facilitate skilled, prompt and reliable access to supervision, designed to meet the immediate needs of their volunteers. This process served to minimise any experience of isolation when supporting others. Additionally, the need for supervision highlights the potential vicarious trauma associated with secondary exposure to harm experienced by others and the cognitive and affective strategies required in response (Aparico et al., 2013).
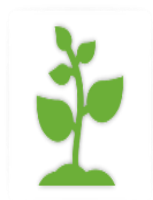
> Every time I do a mentoring, I have to phone them and let them know how it's gone on. Like a report on how it's gone on, and we come in and sit down and have a talk…. usually once a month. We go over all that sort of stuff, so it's sorted, if you like. I've not got it to hold onto. Been there, done it and got sorted out. But I think if I didn't have this sort of support at the back of it, I think it would be a hard, hard, hard slog.

One participant who volunteers for Society Inc. highlighted that beyond the formal purpose of supervision, as means to communicate and safeguard peoples needs. As a volunteer, supervision was a means by which Society Inc. demonstrates he is valued – that they care (Creaven et al., 2018). The extract below, demonstrates how Society Inc. ensure their social network is experienced as personal and reduced their sense of isolation.

> (It) means a lot to me to know that there's support for me as well as I'm supporting someone else. It's really, really weird but …..and if I disappear every now and again they always phone me up or send me a message what you up to, why haven't I seen you, this, that and the other. So, it's like a caring thing, it's like someone's out there that cares.

Reducing social isolation is a foundational Society Inc. activity. Volunteers seek to encourage their clients to safely experience the world around them. That process seeks to disrupt feelings of loneliness and to nurture a greater sense of self-efficacy, belongingness and enjoyment. This active approach supports clients to go beyond pre-contemplation to active engagement with change (DiClemente et al., 1991).

> If they're in a built up area like this, and you go to the park and they never go, but if you sit down and watch squirrels and birds and stuff like that and have a general talk about life, your kids, your animals, whatever. That person then could think to themselves I have to do this again and they might just one day think you know I'm just going to sit in that park and sort this out.

Those who provide support services via Society Inc. provide constant reminders that they are working in partnership with their clients. They emphasise their clients are a key part of the social network of support.

> A lot of them can tell me the different networks and what they're doing and who they're involved with. You learn from your clients as much as they're learning from us.

Civic validation

Beyond the time contribution of Society Inc. staff and volunteers, they are also committed to developing and validating their learning. For example, Society Inc. provides accredited training courses that enable their staff and volunteers to develop their skill and knowledge base. Most participants reported how they have achieved accredited counselling qualifications. Making specific mention of the training they had received which facilitates their understanding of both communication methods, and safeguarding matters.

> The accredited course here covers things that college doesn't cover. The course helps, I know how to communicate, also about adult safeguarding, and you can reflect.

These activities contribute to both individual development and the wider community. Importantly, for more than one participant, it was by volunteering for Society Inc. that they had opportunities to apply their skills. It is in the active use of our acquired skills and knowledge where we gain external validation to bolster and maintain our self-efficacy (Reeb et al., 2010).

> Oh! I've just got a certificate, let me show you, this is an accredited certificate this, but I have other things. Stage One counselling, I've got,other mentoring stuff, but it's only since I've been here, I do all this.

All participants provided examples of the successful impact of their involvement with Society Inc. which had validated the civic role they are fulfilling within their local community. Notably, the action of community engagement also provided benefits in volunteers' perceptions of life.

> Confidence and being a role model for other people best thing. It's made me look at life a lot better.

One volunteer is working with someone who had unfortunately experienced both physically and psychologically debilitating life experiences, from which they had developed some unhelpful coping mechanisms. After only four mentoring visits, the client began to make positive decisions for their well-being.

> I spoke to him about smoking wacky tobacco, I said that's not going to help. He phoned me up and said, I've not had a smoke in over a week. I said that's brilliant, well done. And he said and I've also kicked the other stuff into touch, and I said well really well done you, that's brilliant.

The ability to build on people's strengths to develop their self-efficacy and validate their belongingness is fundamental to the charity's ethos. They focus on strength as a motivator to change rather than negative reinforcers of what is going wrong.

> When you work with that cohort of people who believe they're worthless, when you see a strength in them you generate motivation to change… they already know what they're doing wrong, they come in and tell you, so what's the point of labouring that to death, what are you doing right, that's what I'm interested in and focus on that.

One participant said he was initially uncertain whether volunteering was suitable, for him. However, he explained that in addition to developing his confidence, the act of volunteering has provided the public arena for him to witness the difference he has made to others.

> I thought, give it a go and see how it feels and when I mentored my first client, now I've got him a full-time job and now he's in a relationship and getting out of the house more.

Volunteers report how they assure clients that help is always available, from Society Inc. or another service. This demonstrates that civic validation is not solely recognising what people bring to their communities. Society Inc. by their very presence validate that people can need support and do not have to be isolated.

> If they ever do get stuck… hang on a minute what did that bloke from society Inc say to me, he said I can go there if I need help.

Trusting collaborative norms

In the relatively short time that Society Inc. has been operating it has become a key partner for several organisations, including Salford Royal Hospital and Prescott House Mental Health Unit. Their successful engagement thus far is indicative of civic validation. Furthermore, the process of achieving validation is the successful development of trust and collaboration, between services.

> What we find because we work very closely with adult social care, children's social care…. they've been really well receiving our services… they're a bit more advanced with that and willing to take a risk in that regard, social workers.

These collaborative networks mean that often Society Inc. clients are individuals who are in receipt of 'professional' services but require further community- based support to assist them in the process of addressing often complex needs.

> …more befriending as they are getting support, we are bridging a gap, our clients are getting a lot of support from professional services.

During this evaluation, there has been ample evidence that Society Inc. delivers a service which has a professional infrastructure. In addition, their delivery is founded on valuing people, which is not only written into their policies, but embodied in what they, their volunteers and clients experience.

> We have some really amazing volunteers and clients their stories are so, some of them are so captivating you think how are you still sat there and functioning? Some of them are so brave.

The charity bears witness to strength and bravery in themselves and others. The recognition of bravery and trust is important to social inclusion (Colley, 2003). Society Inc. consistently validates the capacity of its volunteers and clients to make informed decisions. In doing so, they act as collaborative partners rather than helpers. This approach will further a person's self-efficacy and provide an experience of empowered engagement they can transfer to other interactions.

> A lot of clients when they come to us, they know what they want to do, they just don't have the courage to step forward… They just want someone to say yeah you're doing the right thing. A lot of them do know what they're doing, they're just not quite sure how to get to that goal. So, it's about empowering them and giving them that knowledge.

The trust experienced, within the social network of support facilitated by Society Inc. was widely evident. Volunteers trusted Society Inc. would continue to provide services. This reliability of provision is important, so that people who are unable to access the service today, can trust in its availability for when they are ready to engage.

> You can only go so far, you can't force people to do something they don't want to do, obviously, they're not ready for it and I always end my sessions with 'if you want to come back or need help, we are always here'.

The ethos of Society Inc. is that everyone in the community has a right to feel a sense of ownership and belongingness. This is often experienced in the sense of what is authentically known and shared. Although deprivation and its negative effects are wrong, one's survival could bring forth a resilience that enables you, and others to thrive.

> As much as I've had a bad life you also get the other side of the fence where some people have had it badder than what you've had. When you can still associate with them because you've touched on that line where they're at, but you've not let it get you that far.

The experience of inclusion was described in several ways. It was important for all participants that the charity and its workers originate from within the community. As one client explained, the people at Society Inc are like 'us'.

> They're all local, they're all from around here… I think it's because they are more like us and they know what it's like they're obviously quite local.

However, being local was not just a matter of geographical location, as other services such as Sure Start were 'othered', as procedural rather than helpful. Closer analysis revealed the difference lies in Society Inc's. acceptance of a person's vulnerability and their strength.

> They give me advice and help me to make my own decisions. I come in and have a natter, they don't decide for me they get me to decide for myself and it's actually quite nice.

Some participants were able to contribute strategic insights into the positioning of Society Inc. as a provider within the community. Comments made reflect that Society Inc. has become an established charity within the community.

> They clearly have committed workers on the ground and a strong strategic lead in Karen.

In response to Covid-19

During the completion of this evaluation, the UK Government decided to restrict social interaction to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Society Inc. was also affected and closed its hub base. However, it continued to provide services to its clients and volunteers.

> They are continuing to work in this period of time, and you don't have to do that and still keeping in touch with clients and still doing work with their clients.

Some clients were still quite new to their engagement with Society Inc. at the time social restrictions were put in place. Many of their clients are vulnerable and the 'lockdown' effects added pressure on some families while simultaneously limiting access to the support that might otherwise be available to them. However, Society Inc. immediately adapted to this novel situation and continued to complete activities to provide support for clients and their families.

> It was his birthday, yesterday and she came around outside, and she'd brought him books …he thinks she's wonderful.

The perspective of those providing Society Inc. services is quite acute. In addition to delivering their mentoring and befriending services by telephone, it quickly became apparent that the client's needs were exacerbated by the impact of the virus and associated social restrictions.

> It was grim before this (Covid), I see people queuing at the foodbank. I know how many people out there are working full-time and still having to go to the foodbank. It's a massive eyeopener to how things was before this. No-one can survive on universal credit.

In response to the Covid-19 virus and associated social restrictions, Society Inc. reports their clients and people in the community have returned to focus on their basic need for survival.

> They've gone back to survival instincts, so it isn't about them wanting to share their problems with other people as in peer mentor support, it's about basic instincts they want food, gas and electric. They want to know they have food in the cupboard for the kids. We got a small grant and we've distributed supplies of food.

Society Inc. have used the changing needs during the Covid19 restrictions, to further develop their networking activities with other local organisations. Social restrictions inhibit people from approaching organisations to have their different needs met. Therefore, Society Inc. have been proactive in developing

communication links with others to streamline services and ensure they are not duplicating their activities.

> I knew what other organisations were out there locally and so their connecting with our clients as well, it is so essential that you are part of a network. Where to get nappies and things rather than agencies doubling up and I think that helps because we are working in communities that we live in.

In addition to their ability to work effectively within the Little Hulton area, Society Inc. has used its reach across Salford to facilitate other organisations charities to support families living elsewhere in the city.

> Basically, because I have a car, we can go across Salford. I've just been to Lower Broughton, so organisations in Little Hulton are taking care of organisations in Lower Broughton. The massive spec across the whole of Salford is where we are working from now.

A constant theme throughout the evaluation process was the importance of highlighting the value of those who are using Society Inc. services. This did not falter, even during this time of critical and acute need.

> The clients that have agoraphobia and anxiety have all this on top, but they are probably better to dealing with it than they understand, we got one of our clients to make jewellery and put out craft boxes to help people to occupy their time.

Finally, at a time of a pandemic, Society Inc. provides a constant reminder to never forget the importance of knowing you are not alone. During a pandemic, it is especially important to have the assurance of a trusted person who will assist in extending your sense of belonging within the community.

> Someone being at the end of your gate, a familiar face saying 'if you want anything ring us'.

Conclusion

During this evaluation, there has been ample evidence Society Inc. delivers a service that is built upon a professional infrastructure. Their delivery is founded on valuing people, not just within their policies, but embodied in what they, their volunteers and clients experience. They operate in a landscape of multiple deprivations, that has endured across time.

Society Inc. seek out the strength in what people can provide, with support, to each another. They see beyond the vulnerability created by multi-faceted and generational deprivation. That perspective enables them to recognise the strength and courage needed to survive, if not thrive despite adversity and deprivation.

Using experiential evidence this evaluation demonstrates how Society Inc. contributes to the development of social inclusion. They enable local people to support others in their community and facilitate local communities to support each other. Additionally, they provide accredited training which builds knowledge and skills which are reinvested back into the community.

The report evidences how Society Inc. empowers social inclusion. It does this in a variety of ways, which are all built on the development of reliable authentic - personal relationships. This small charity thrives on an ever growing network of individuals and local organisations who come together to collectively meet the needs of others. The growth of their organisational and referral network

contributes to the validation of their civic enterprise.

Trust is a crucial component of their infrastructure. They value the trust placed in them by the community, health and social services. Equally, they value the trust the people of Little Hulton have placed in them. In turn, the people of Little Hulton and Salford who engaged in this study valued the trust, care and training that Society Inc. invests in them.

This small charity manages to deliver services, predominantly in Little Hulton, but also across the city, on a shoestring budget. It maximises the skills of its clients, volunteers and staff to meet complex and changing needs in one of country's most deprived areas. Importantly Society Inc. invest, their limited funds in people and their capacity to develop and contribute to others. It is a model of sustainability.

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