Charities Aid Foundation
Resilience Fund Report 2023

Find out more

Learnings from a different type of grantmaking
designed to build charity resilience
The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Resilience Fund was a £40 million funding programme, which ran between 2020-2023, to support communities hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

These extraordinary times required rapid, creative responses from the charitable sector and flexible, innovative support from funders. This report reviews the different approaches to grantmaking undertaken by CAF in Phase 2 of the fund and shares the learnings for both charities and funders.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This programme would not have been possible without the generosity and support of several key organisations and individuals who partnered with Charities Aid Foundation (CAF).

We are grateful to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for funding the initiative as part of their Community Match Challenge. These funds were kindly matched by the Covid-19 Support Fund created by the insurance and long-term savings industry.

The learning and insights shared in this report have emerged from our work with the 102 charities funded through the programme. It also builds on previous research CAF has undertaken looking at organisational resilience. CAF would like to thank all the charities who received funding for sharing this journey with us. Their generous feedback and valuable input have helped us understand the impact of this grantmaking approach. These insights will help shape the way CAF designs grant programmes and supports charities in the future. It will also contribute to ongoing conversations on effective and engaging grantmaking.

The CAF Resilience Fund provides a model for what exceptional grantmaking can achieve. This programme was a critical part of an innovative partnership between the public, private and third sector which came together to achieve much more than one organisation could do alone. We thank our partners in the insurance and long-term savings industry and the Government for their generous funding, which helped charities to continue to deliver services to some of society’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged people, and build their resilience for the future.

Neil Heslop OBE, Chief Executive, Charities Aid Foundation
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is the CAF Resilience Fund?
The CAF Resilience Fund is a £40 million grant programme generously funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the insurance and long-term savings industry as part of the Covid-19 Support Fund. Funding was split into two phases.

Phase 1 saw £20 million disbursed to help a total of 645 charities survive and deliver rapid relief to communities during the early stages of the pandemic.

Phase 2 enabled 102 charitable organisations to adapt and thrive while also covering service delivery and core costs. The grants were targeted to three areas that had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We also worked with five sector partners in these cause areas to ensure the resilience funding got to where it was most needed. Charities who received support were:

- Supporting people who are living with a disability.
- Working with and/or led by Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.
- Assisting young adults aged 16 to 35 years with skills to transition from education, training and unemployment into work.

Each grant holder received a Main Grant of between £50,000 and £350,000 alongside a Resilience Support Grant of £10,000 to £20,000.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS GRANT PROGRAMME?

Phase 2 was designed to provide the resources needed for charitable organisations to continue to deliver much-needed support to communities whilst also funding work to boost their organisational resilience. It was an integrated grant programme, with two complimentary grants alongside tailored support.

Each grant holder received a Main Grant of between £50,000 and £350,000 alongside a Resilience Support Grant of £10,000 to £20,000. The tailored support programme provided charity leaders and their teams with a range of one-to-one support, online peer learning sessions, toolkits, webinars and other opportunities to connect with and learn from one another.
Did we manage to build charity resilience?

Resilience is a journey rather than a destination and looks different for each charity. Each of our funded charities started the grant programme at different points and identified their own ambitions and ‘roadmaps’ to guide their resilience work.

Many used their grants to support, review and reflect following the Covid-19 pandemic:

• Taking stock post-pandemic by reviewing purpose, leadership and strategies;

• Shoring up the foundations with new systems, processes and policies; and

• Building for the future by reshaping operating models, diversifying income and demonstrating impact.

Whilst the journeys are individual for each of the charities, most reported a significant increase in their understanding of organisational resilience and progress towards improving their own charity’s resilience. Feedback indicated significant improvement, with understanding of resilience rising from 38% to 85%, and progress in boosting resilience increasing from 49% to 83%.
What were the key learnings?

Throughout this programme, we remained committed to trying new approaches and evolved the approach based on regular feedback from all the funded charities. We hope these key learnings will help more charities to undertake resilience work and inspire other donors and funders to prioritise this approach.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**KEY LEARNINGS FOR GRANTMAKING:**

1. Longer term funding is crucial for ongoing resilience work, but there are also opportunities for ‘quick wins’. Shorter term funding can help charities to lay the foundations for long-term success.

2. Ringfencing a small proportion of funding for resilience work is effective, especially with the broader shift to unrestricted funding.

3. Project delivery funding and resilience funding are equally as important. Progress was made on resilience when the Main Grant and Resilience Support Funding were running in parallel.

4. It’s not just about the money. Whilst the grants were vital, additional support was key to the success of this programme.

5. This type of resilience work was new for many charities and the support for funded charities pre-application ensures a shared understanding of expectations and opportunities.

**KEY LEARNINGS FOR CHARITIES:**

1. Resilience work can seem daunting before you start. The first step can be the hardest. Once you have explored and identified priorities, you can make a start.

2. Make realistic plans with clear steps and timelines. Keep reviewing your priorities to stay focused on what you want to achieve.

3. Buy-in from your governing board is vital. We encouraged charities to begin discussions before they applied.

4. Staff connection and engagement is key. Including wider staff teams has a positive effect on the process and also boosts staff morale.

5. There is value in using a resilience framework. We know that the shared language and vision of the CAF resilience characteristics and roadmap helped our funded charities to frame ambitions, shape priorities, plan work and evidence change.

What were the key learnings?
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The CAF Resilience Fund was developed and delivered during extraordinary times. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities within the charitable sector, as well as the communities they support.

Many charities were reeling from the rapid changes their organisations had already made to survive and meet increased levels of need and demand within their communities. Even before the pandemic hit, a significant number of charities had been working in survival mode, due to long term underfunding of central costs. This left them ill-prepared to deal with the extraordinary demands brought by Covid-19.

This is the first time that British Blind Sport has received funding to develop its resilience and it has been transformational for us.

British Blind Sport

The CAF Resilience Fund offered an opportunity to approach grantmaking in a new way; to support communities hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic; and invest in the charitable organisations that had rallied to provide that support. Our aim was to design a funding programme that provided grants and integrated support, empowering charities to navigate post-pandemic challenges and thrive in the future.
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

During Phase 1, £20 million was distributed to 645 charities that were providing extraordinary levels of support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many were adapting quickly to meet the changing needs of communities.

Phase 2 was designed to build organisational resilience as well as supporting delivery in 102 charities. Supporting frontline service delivery and core costs remained vitally important, but charities also needed support to survive, adapt and thrive in the future.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PHASE 2

Investing in delivery and resilience-building: We aimed to provide charities with the time, space and expertise to enhance their organisational resilience. Our funding programme included two grants that worked together: a Main Grant to cover project, staff, and organisational costs; and a Resilience Support Grant to bring in external expertise for long-term sustainability.

Trust and flexibility: We wanted to give charities greater control over how they spent their grant. We trusted them to make decisions that would achieve the best outcomes for individuals, communities and their organisations. This autonomy was particularly important as we transitioned out of the pandemic, anticipating unforeseen challenges that could impact the plans outlined in their grant applications.

Testing non-financial support to boost the impact: We knew that for many the concept of building organisational resilience was new. To support them through the process, we provided non-financial support. This included one-to-one support, group activities, tools, resilience building framework and networking opportunities to bring our grant holders together.
CAF RESILIENCE FUND BUILDING BLOCKS

Our grant holders

102 Charities funded
3 cause areas targeted:
Disability | BAME | Young adult unemployment and reskilling

The money

Main Grants
Grants of
£50,000 to £350,000
Total awards
£13,497,693

Resilience Support Grants
Grants of
£10,000 to £20,000
Total awards
£1,593,869*

The added support

Tailored support programme
Roadmap workshops | Consultant support | Learning webinars | Networking events | Coworking sessions

*Note – total includes additional match funding of £93,869 contributed by CAF

I've not known an opportunity like this. The flexibility of the grant meant we achieved so much more. Our work on good governance and strategy development gave rise to ideas about developing a youth steering group to shape our work.

Churches Trust

The experience and learning we have gained in the process will support our future development, having a lasting impact for our organisation and those we support.

Niemann-Pick UK
### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Total amount</th>
<th>Number of grants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td>£1,472,238</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ireland</strong></td>
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<td><strong>East Midlands</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>East of England</strong></td>
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**Map of distribution of total grants by nation and region**

Click the hotspots for detailed information.
CASE STUDY

GOSAD

Building resilience for a charity supporting youth employability in BAME communities.

The cause

GOSAD is a West London-based charity that works with the local community to build a vibrant and equal society. They provide skills-building projects, courses, advocacy and advice. GOSAD was ready to respond to community needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. The team devised new ways to work safely, partnered with other organisations and increased their volunteer pool. Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities were impacted disproportionately by the Covid-19 pandemic with challenges further exacerbated by the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. As a result, demand for GOSAD's employability and other support increased sharply, as the impact on mental health and wellbeing left many in crisis.

Main Grant:
£94,500 towards employability and wellbeing support for young people from BAME communities.

Resilience Support Grant:
£15,000 for consultancy to help develop their business plan, support their Board and work on an income generation strategy.

Tailored support programme:
One-to-one monthly support call from the CAF Resilience team, online events and networking opportunities.
The impact

The main grant enabled GOSAD to help 35 young people transition into paid employment. A further 12 have started apprenticeships and seven have returned to study. GOSAD have also helped these young people address wider challenges such as housing, debt, mental health and discrimination.

The Resilience Support Grant enabled GOSAD to build their organisational resilience:

- Funding gave them the space, time and support to develop a clear, realistic business plan. This has already helped them secure additional funding to expand into a neighbouring borough.
- Support provided to help develop their Board led to the successful recruitment and training of two new trustees. This has brought additional skills and experience to the organisation.
- GOSAD have also secured funding to partner with other Black-led organisations. They used the grant to develop their role as partnership convenor, providing capacity building and support to local BAME organisations and helping others to thrive.
- The support they received to scope income generation opportunities helped GOSAD to position themselves as a strategic partner of the local authority. They are now in a strong position for a five-year commissioning round.

Resilience work takes time; it’s like cooking! This grant has given us the right ingredients: the time, financial resources and support. Having input, expertise, advice and a soundboard for our ideas from our consultant and members of the CAF team has helped us get there.

Sharmarke Diriye, Programme Lead, GOSAD
IMPACT AND LEARNING

The CAF Resilience Fund invested in service delivery and resilience-building, with three key elements contributing to the overall impact; the Main Grant, the Resilience Support Grant and the Tailored Support Programme.

01 THE MAIN GRANT

Grant holders received Main Grants of between £50,000 and £350,000 (up to 30% of their annual income) totalling £13.5m across the 102 funded charities. This funded delivery and core costs, enabling them to support their communities whilst also investing in their sustainability. We asked grant holders to give an indication of where they would spend the grant and gave flexibility to allocate in these areas and to adapt during the grant period. Most grant holders used their Main Grant to fund a combination of wellbeing and social activities; education and employment; and health and social care. These included costs to run services like counselling, mentoring, community workshops and training.

Grant holders spoke of the grants enabling them to increase their impact in the world. For some, this meant service and staff development to adapt or expand their offer by adding other support elements (for example, offering wellbeing support to those accessing skills training). For others, it meant expanding their reach and working with new communities or in new locations. Others were able to design and test new ways of delivering often using digital engagement.

Direct beneficiaries: 166,711
Indirect beneficiaries: 490,579
Organisational transformation

We received reports of significant changes for individuals, communities and organisations as a direct result of activity funded by the Main Grant.

54% of grant holders reported transformational change within their charities, and a further 41% said that there were improvements. The combination of the Main and the Resilience Support Grants provided flexibility for charities to develop their foundations, provide much-needed support, and test new services and ways of working.

Change was also reported at the community level, but fewer charities reported transformation here. However, this was a relatively short grant period, and we know that meaningful change at community-level takes considerable time and is impacted by many external factors. It is encouraging, though, that organisations observed some change for the communities they support, suggesting that longer term funding of this kind could support deeper, sustained change for communities.

95% of grant holders have seen positive change within their charity and of those 54% thought that change was transformational.
Alongside their Main Grant, charities were awarded a Resilience Support Grant of between £10,000 and £20,000. This money was ringfenced to help them secure external expertise to help strengthen their organisations and support them to thrive in the future. CAF provided a list of suggested consultants and providers with relevant expertise, but charities were free to select their own providers as well. Charities told us that the combination of the Resilience Support Grant which allowed them to bring in external expertise and capacity, and the Main Grant supported progress at pace. This ultimately meant that the funding went further.

**Resilience journeys**

We know that resilience looks different for every charity. From the start, each charity was supported through individual or group workshops to develop their own resilience roadmap. Each roadmap reflected the strengths, challenges and priorities of the individual organisations. These included quarterly plans to develop different elements of their organisational resilience.

We used a framework developed in our previous CAF Resilience Programme pilot to establish a common understanding and vocabulary.

Through an earlier pilot of the CAF Resilience Programme and our wider work with charities, we’ve noticed six characteristics that show a charity has the potential to be resilient. We used this research to develop a framework that can help charities reflect on their resilience and prioritise areas for improvement. This framework also establishes a common understanding and shared vocabulary allowing our grant holders to exchange ideas, track progress and network more effectively together.

CAF’s six characteristics of a resilient charity are:

1. A clearly articulated and widely understood charity mission and purpose.
2. Awareness of the external environment in which they operate.
3. Effective leadership from both the board and senior staff.
4. Networks and partnerships that support the charity’s mission and purpose.
5. Finances and operations that are fit for purpose.
6. An ability to capture and communicate their charity impact.

The work undertaken as part of the funding will have long term impact on our organisation and we are already seeing the impact day to day.

YMCA Swansea

We have adapted and tailored our successful pre-employment and mental health support programmes for two new audiences – young adults and people from racialised communities. 288 people have benefited. All had mental health problems which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cellar Trust
ACTIVITY AND IMPACT

Delivering their resilience roadmaps enabled grant holders to:

- **Take stock post-pandemic** by reviewing purpose, leadership and strategies;
- **Shore up the foundations** with new systems, processes and policies; and
- **Build for the future** by reshaping operating models, diversifying income and demonstrating impact.

Grant holders invested in a variety of activities, but all reported significant increases in both their understanding of organisational resilience and progress made towards improving their own charity’s resilience.

A variety of areas were covered, with leadership, finance and operations, and organisational impact being particularly prominent. When telling their resilience stories, charities reference the connections between each characteristic and a “domino effect” in which work on one characteristic directly informed priorities and activities on others. Thus, some charities adapted their roadmaps during the grant period, and many charities referenced the flexibility to review and adapt their plans as a particular strength since it supported the evolution of new ideas.

Leaders and their teams face multiple competing pressures and focus is often diverted from longer term strategic work to more immediate ‘fire-fighting’. Many of the leaders reported that the ringfenced Resilience Support Grant gave them permission and accountability to undertake this work. There was honesty that, for many, this funding would have been diverted to the frontline if this had not been ringfenced. This supports our previous insight that leaders can struggle to protect time and resource for development and strategy work.

Many said this grant funding helped them to do things “properly”, with involvement, buy-in and understanding from their teams, Boards, communities and wider stakeholders. Communities were at the core: charities often invested their funding in community needs assessment, genuine co-design processes and the development of community-led governance structures to make this a sustainable shift.

For many, it was their first time they had allocated a budget to engage external support. While some were initially sceptical about the value, most charities reported positive experiences of working with their consultants. Through the process, they had learned how to identify providers who are a good fit, scope projects, and allocate staff time.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR GRANTMAKING:

- It’s not an ‘either/or’ for project delivery funding and resilience funding. Both were crucial to the success of this programme. Progress was made on resilience when the Main Grant and Resilience Support Funding were running in parallel. This gave leaders the space to focus on strategic development which was crucial for long-term sustainability and success. The two grants were connected and mutually supporting.

- Within the welcome wider shift to unrestricted funding, ringfencing a small proportion of the support for resilience work is effective. Whilst we trusted charities to identify their priorities and activities, ringfencing part of the grant gave them permission to protect this funding from being diverted to meet frontline demands and built in accountability for longer term work on sustainability.
Charities that understood the wider environment were better able to shape their strategies and communications. Some joined professional groups and attended conferences, while others identified new services for their users.

The fund helped charities reflect on their core values and purpose in the wake of Covid-19. Many conducted Community Needs Assessments and shaped new services and ways of working to better meet needs or extend reach.

Charities developed evaluation and monitoring frameworks to measure impact. This helped them improve internal learning, develop new services, share best practices, and demonstrate value to funders and stakeholders.

Many charities improved their systems, processes and funding. Financial fitness was a key focus, and organisations developed fundraising skills, streamlined financial processes, and diversified funding sources.

By mapping their networks, charities were able to explore ways to improve existing relationships, form new partnerships and secure funding for them.

There was significant success in helping charities develop structure to support good leadership and governance. There was also progress in supporting individuals and teams and recruiting and developing diverse boards, with many leaders reporting increased morale and performance.
What’s next?

Resilience is a journey and does not stop at the end of the grant period. Many of the funded charities have made plans for the coming year, which seek to embed and build on their achievements and learning. This includes implementing their new strategies and ways of working, developing staff and Boards, diversifying income, and extending reach and impact. Confidence was built during the year and this was noted by many as an important lasting outcome from their work on the programme.

Some have already sought and been awarded further funding to develop resilience. Others have secured funding for new delivery and cited their work on the Resilience Support Grant as an important factor in making the case for further support. Many charities intend to keep the ‘roadmap’ tool to help them plan ongoing resilience work and for Boards and staff to review this annually.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR CHARITIES:

• Resilience work can seem daunting before you start. The first step can be the hardest but once you have explored and identified priorities you can progress. It’s a virtuous circle once you do start with work on one area unlocking insights and progress to inform other areas of resilience.

• Making realistic plans with clear steps and timelines works. Keep reviewing your priorities to keep a focus on what you want to achieve. Sequencing is important with things like work on purpose and values needing to be looked at before developing a fundraising strategy, for example.

• There is value in using a resilience framework. We know that the shared language and vision of the CAF characteristics and roadmap helped our funded charities to frame ambitions, shape priorities, plan work and evidence change. This framework can also be great for making the case for further support.

The development of a post-pandemic business plan has opened up new opportunities and we are currently tendering for an opportunity we would not even have considered 3 years ago.

The Ark Trust
CAF designed the Resilience Fund with the explicit intention of doing things differently. We wanted to go beyond traditional funder-funded relationships. The focus was on designing a relational grants programme which sought to be supportive and flexible, with a culture of learning at its heart.

We tested different tailored support approaches:

It’s felt much more like a partnership, rather than it being a transactional relationship.

10% of grant holders met monthly with our team for 1:1 support coaching sessions with the CAF programme team

50% of grant holders joined ‘peer support’ groups, with regular lunch-and-learn sessions, and access to online co-working spaces

102 All grant holders were invited to a pre-application webinar, a resilience roadmap workshop, how to work with consultants briefing, learning and networking webinars and had access to an online community
WHAT DID OUR GRANT HOLDERS THINK OF THE FUND?

For the vast majority of grant holders this was an extremely positive experience. Many reported that the trust and flexibility led to better relationships and better outcomes.

Many said they felt heard and valued and that “the team was rooting for us.” This was particularly significant for those in the peer support and one-to-one support groups, who had more personal interaction.

Charities told us that they found the roadmap workshop and pre-application webinars particularly useful. These helped them develop their understanding of resilience and provide clarity on expectations, frame ambitions, shape priorities and plan resilience work.

Collaboration throughout allowed charities to connect with and learn from a wider variety of individuals and organisations.

Providing this tailored support in addition to financial support helps to create a relationship with a funder based on trust. Although increased resources were required to facilitate this additional engagement, the feedback received makes us confident that this is more than worth the investment made.

I think we were actually kind of forced into doing the stuff that we always kicked down the road – the stuff that we all know is important but often I am too ‘in it to get on it’ and that’s a good thing.

—— Beith Trust

This was more help than can be imagined it has change our whole outlook and identity. It stopped us from looking inwards and enabled us to look forward and change.

—— Advocacy Matters

In my almost three decades of working within the voluntary sector, I have never seen / heard of such an amazing package of support, that truly supports charities to focus on areas of resilience and sustainability.

—— Disability Solutions West Midlands

97% of grant holders rated it 9 or 10 out of 10
KEY LEARNINGS FOR GRANTMAKING:

• Longer term funding is crucial for ongoing resilience work, but there are opportunities for ‘quick wins’. Shorter term funding can and did enable charities to lay the foundations for resilience. Charities were able to review their purpose, shape strategies and plans which enabled them to reconnect more fully with their mission. They also invested in systems and processes to improve efficiency and enable resources to be focussed on making impact through direct work.

• It’s not just about the money. Whilst the grants were vital, the additional support provided was key to the success of this programme. The roadmap facilitation and additional support was seen by the charities as something that contributed greatly to their ability to drive change in their organisations. We anticipate this will result in an ongoing impact beyond the term of the funding, with benefits flowing from the upskilling of staff using a resilience framework and having a common language to take resilience work forward.

• This type of resilience work was new for many and the support for charities pre-application ensures a shared understanding of expectations and opportunities. Post-Covid access to webinars were a gift here to make information accessible.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR CHARITIES:

• Buy-in from your governing Board is vital. We encouraged charities to include their Board from the start of the application process. This proved extremely effective as Boards stepped up to own the resilience plan and their role in supporting staff and holding teams accountable.

• Staff connection and engagement is key. Charities fed back that extending involvement across wider staff teams had a positive effect on the process and also boosted staff morale. Taking the time to connect, listen, celebrate, have difficult conversations through away days, team time etc is especially relevant in a post-Covid world where much more connection time is virtual.

Engaging with support through roadmap and networking events has been essential in helping Babbasa on our resilience journey.

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Babbasa
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Throughout this programme, we remained committed to trying new approaches and evolved the approach based on regular feedback from all our grant holders.

We hope these key learnings will help more charities to undertake resilience work and inspire other donors and funders to prioritise this approach.

CAF are already using learning from the Resilience Fund and incorporating this into future grant design. We have incorporated many of the elements of this programme into our new Keystone Fund and look forward to continuing our learning alongside our new grant holders.
Note on use of terms:
Resilience has been described as the ability of an organisation to survive and prosper. A highly resilient organisation is more adaptive, competitive, agile and robust than less resilient organisations and rebounds from adversity strengthened and more resourceful. However, there is no single, universal blueprint of resilience that applies equally to every organisation. For the purposes of this programme, we focused on six characteristics of resilience that were relevant to our previous work with a cohort of ten charities. We wanted to explore how these characteristics impacted on the ability of each charity to recover quickly from setbacks and adapt to the changing environment in which they operate.

Funded charities: all 102 charities that received funding in Phase 2 of the CAF Resilience Grant. Some are charities and others CICs.

Funders: all organisations and individuals who financially support charities.

BAME: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. We have used this term in our report but acknowledge that its use can be problematic as it does not fully encompass the rich diversity of different ethnic groups in the UK. Whilst it is an imperfect term to use, we have included it in this report as it was the term that CAF used when we launched the grant fund and identified the three cause groups. We know that how we write about race and ethnicity matters and CAF is always reviewing our language and working with community organisations to evolve the language we use.