BUILDING CASH FIRST COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTH WEST

Anton Wynn from South Cotswolds Foodbank shares some top tips.....

Using Data to Shape Crisis and Resilience Fund Provision - A few starters.

An effective way to influence the design and delivery of Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) provision is to combine publicly available data with your own service-user evidence. This is especially impactful in rural areas, where publicly available data cannot tell the whole story and your valuable evidence helps present a clearer picture to decision makers.

Public data can help identify areas of need, while organisational data and lived experience can explain why those needs exist and what support is most effective.

1. Start with Profiling Your Area

Before looking at service data, it is useful to build a profile of the communities you support. Much of this information is publicly available, with the 2021 Census providing an excellent starting point.

Key datasets and tools

Rurality

Understanding how rural your area is can help demonstrate the challenges people face in accessing support. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Rural-Urban Classification allows organisations to identify both the proportion of rural population and rural land within a local authority area.

For organisations working in rural communities, population-based measures are often the most useful, as they highlight how people are dispersed across villages and smaller settlements rather than concentrated in larger towns.

Source:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/ruralurbanclassifications/2021ruralurbanclassification

Housing Tenure

ONS Census Maps allow users to explore housing tenure down to neighbourhood level. This is particularly useful for identifying concentrations of social housing, privately rented accommodation, or owner-occupied properties, helping target place-based support and outreach activity.

Source:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/housing/tenure-of-household/hh-tenure-5a/rented-social-rented

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Transport Access

Transport poverty can be a significant barrier to accessing support. Census mapping data on household vehicle ownership can help identify communities where people may be particularly reliant on public transport.

Source:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/housing/number-of-cars-or-vans/number-of-cars-3a/no-cars-or-vans-in-household

Public Transport Connectivity

The Department for Transport's Connectivity Tool provides information on access to employment, education, healthcare and other services by public transport, helping organisations understand where transport links may be limiting opportunities or access to support.

Source:
https://connectivity-tool-lite.dft.gov.uk/

The census data contains much more useful information that this and other useful data includes household composition, disability, unpaid caring responsibilities, employment status, qualifications and housing conditions, all of which can help build a picture of vulnerability within an area.

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2. Make Use of Welfare and Poverty Data

LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker)

Where available, LIFT is an extremely powerful tool used by a growing number of local authorities. It combines a wide range of administrative datasets (mostly populated by DWP data but increasingly growing as other partners share information) to identify households experiencing or at risk of poverty. It can help authorities and partners understand trends in low-income households, identify groups who may be missing out on entitlements, and target support more effectively.

Access is usually held by local authorities and may be available through partnership arrangements.

Stat-Xplore

For organisations without access to LIFT, the Department for Work and Pensions' Stat-Xplore service is potentially a good alternative.

Stat-Xplore enables users to create customised reports and maps using benefits and welfare data, often down to ward level. It can be used to analyse:

- Universal Credit claimants
- Pension Credit recipients
- Disability benefit claimants
- Children in relative and absolute poverty
- Employment support benefits

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- Carers and other vulnerable groups

The platform is particularly helpful when building evidence around financial hardship and understanding how need varies across a district.

Source:
https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/

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3. Understand Your Own Service Data

Public data provides context, and may help target service delivery, but your own organisational data often provides the strongest evidence.

Referral Data

At South Cotswolds Foodbank, referral information helps us understand:

- Why people require emergency support
- Household composition
- Trends in presenting need
- Changes in demand over time (inc. number of referrals, unique beneficiaries, new beneficiaries etc)

Referral data can identify emerging or persistent issues and demonstrate the pressures local households are facing.

Casework and Resilience Support Data

Our case management system (CharityLog) collects more detailed information from people receiving resilience-building support.

The information is gathered primarily to ensure individuals receive the most appropriate support, but it also provides a rich source of anonymised evidence about:

- Financial difficulties
- Housing issues
- Employment challenges
- Health and wellbeing concerns
- Access to benefits and other support

The system also records outcomes, including financial gains secured for households and broader resilience measures.

Using a consistent set of questions at the start and end of support allows us to monitor changes in areas such as:

- Confidence managing money
- Mental wellbeing
- Knowledge of available support services

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- Ability to cope with future financial difficulties

Combining this data, allows us to clearly prove the impact of resilience building support on reducing recurring use of our services.

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4. Listen to Lived Experience

Numbers alone rarely tell the whole story.

Service-user surveys, feedback mechanisms and lived experience panels provide insight into the reality behind the statistics. They help:

- Test assumptions
- Understand barriers to accessing support
- Identify gaps in existing provision
- Co-produce solutions with communities

Appropriately anonymised stories can bring data to life and are often highly effective when engaging policymakers, commissioners and funders. These could be used in text form for newsletters or reports or short form media to raise awareness of issues, or reduce stigma around accessing support.

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5. Use Data Visualisation Tools

South Cotswolds Foodbank uses Microsoft Power BI to bring together information from multiple sources, including:

- Census data
- Welfare statistics
- Referral data
- Casework information
- Survey results

Power BI allows data to be segmented by geography, household type, presenting issue and many other factors, helping identify trends and communicate findings clearly to stakeholders.

Previously we have used mapping tools such as ARCGIS, but have found that mapping in PowerBI is sufficient for our needs.

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6. Draw on Partner Data

Additional insights can often be obtained from partner organisations.

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For example, South Cotswolds Foodbank funds external regulated financial advice services and receives aggregated reporting on:

- Benefit advice provided
- Debt advice delivered
- Financial outcomes achieved
- Emerging client issues

This information helps identify trends and areas where additional support or advocacy may be required.

Turning Data into Influence

The most compelling evidence combines:

1. **Public data** (Census, rurality, welfare and transport data)
2. **Operational data** (referrals and casework)
3. **Partner data** (advice, support and specialist services)
4. **Lived experience** (stories and feedback)

Together, these sources provide a strong evidence base for engaging local authorities, influencing the development of schemes such as the Crisis and Resilience Fund, advocating for communities experiencing hardship, and demonstrating impact to existing and prospective funders.

The experience of local authorities delivering CRF schemes has highlighted the importance of organisations bringing strong local insight and evidence into discussions about scheme design and delivery. Early engagement, practical evidence and constructive partnerships are key to shaping effective local provision.



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