Trussell: Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS)

Improving access to and engagement with cash and advice for people experiencing hardship

Trussell, as part of their commitment to working towards ending the need for food banks, invested in five localised 'test and learn' pilot projects in Scotland in Dundee, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, Orkney, and Perth and Kinross. All the pilots had the aim of improving access to and engagement with cash and advice, influencing policy and practice, finding out what might work, and learning from what does not work. Each pilot had different operating models developed by partnerships in each locality.

Between June 2023 and September 2024, the projects directly supported almost **3,200 people** of whom almost 1,700 have achieved a total of **£840,000 in financial gains**. In addition to the financial gains and wider positive impacts for individuals, **131 Community Guiders**[1] were trained in Dundee and **43 organisations and services**, and 378 individual users, have signed up to use the FORT (Fast Online Referral Tracking) system in Perth and Kinross so far.

In March 2023, Trussell commissioned an independent evaluation by Rocket Science to assess the potential of the PACS pilot projects in improving access to income maximisation and financial inclusion support.

Summary of Key Learnings

Partnerships and process:

- Existing partnerships and relationships are a key facilitator for effective delivery to improve pathways to cash and advice. This was common across all sites.
- Different organisations have very different approaches, systems and processes for governance. If introducing a new system, or a new data sharing or referral procedure, it is important that a robust mobilisation plan is mapped out and realistic timescales are agreed with all partners.
- People in hunger and hardship are often not aware of the support that is available, which may be due to the complexity of the support landscape and funding changes. Both people accessing support and practitioners can find it difficult to understand the support that is available and what support people are eligible for. Raising awareness about the availability and benefit of advice services is crucial to maximise engagement.
- Building trust with vulnerable individuals with complex cases is vital, and a good referral pathway helps people maintain engagement. This is particularly important for people at crisis point, or where an early intervention can significantly impact outcomes and prevent escalation.

Outcomes for people:

- Ensuring that **people voices are heard** and that services are co-designed, user-centred and responsive to feedback is critical.
- Flexible service delivery and **multi-method delivery**, including in-person, online, or phone ensures that support is accessible and effective and is preferred by people. This is particularly important for more vulnerable groups, or complex cases. Support that is **relational and trust based**, with one named case worker, is seen as more effective in maximising ongoing engagement, minimising disengagement and improving outcomes.
- People often face complex, interconnected challenges that require **consistent guidance and ongoing support** to achieve stability and long-term improvement. Often vulnerable people may have complex cases and a combination of issues, which highlights the need for funding models that support sustained engagement, rather than short-term interventions.

[1] Community Guiders are recruited as volunteers from the local community or from local third sector or public sector organisations staff teams, to support people to access support including money.

Summary of Recommendations

Service design

- People need to access support quickly if they are in an emergency situation. Support delivered within 24 hours should be a key performance indicator for future commissioned services, with clear service delivery criteria.
- People facing multiple disadvantage may want immediate support but not proceed with a referral for longer term support. Therefore, staff should have capacity to follow-up proactively with people, most likely by having some staff with lower caseloads, and disengagement should not be seen as a failure.
- People like multi-method delivery, this ensures that support is accessible and removes barriers to access. In future, multi-channel approaches within a single case, where people can access face to face, email, text or phone support, should be an aspiration.
- Support that is relational and trust based, with one named case worker is effective in maximising ongoing engagement. Building trust takes time and therefore more resources and lower caseloads.
- Often people are unsure about how referrals have been made and who has provided support. Clear, simple, accessible branding is important, as well as a no wrong door approach. If a new brand is introduced, it should be expected that this will take time to become recognised, so an appropriate investment in marketing and communications is important.

Trauma- Informed Approach

- The pilots all took a trauma-informed approach. A trauma informed approach is important because it **a**voids re-traumatisation; improves outcomes; builds trust which leads to better engagement; and **e**mpowers people to take control over their lives. In food banks or advice settings, a trauma-informed approach could be taken, that incorporates a commitment to:
    - create a calm, safe and secure environment which is non-judgemental
    - give people choice and control, taking a cash-first and strengths-based approach
    - build trust and transparency (e.g. avoids changing the rules, is consistent)
    - build trust, connections and community, and avoids a transactional approach
    - be culturally aware and inclusive

  Formalising this into a standard approach across the sector would be beneficial.

Wider recommendations

- Providing integrated support services that link food banks with broader support and advice is valuable, such as co-location or warm handovers following referrals. Integrating immediate assistance with long term strategies, will continue to reduce the reliance on food banks and support people towards financial stability.
- Training food bank staff and volunteers to refer people to relevant services, may add value. Advice services could take an intensive case managed approach, with named, dedicated case workers for individuals facing chronic food insecurity, to help them navigate resources and address long term issues and provide more intensive and holistic long-term support.
- People facing a crisis situation are often overwhelmed or vulnerable, so the immediate focus should be on providing support, stability, emotional reassurance and addressing the immediate need. However, once the person feels less overwhelmed, calmer and safer, a teachable moment can emerge to help them reflect on how to build resilience for the future and make long term changes.
- There may be more opportunities to **identify individuals at risk** through partnerships with schools, healthcare providers, and housing services. This would enable targeted, early intervention that could prevent crises from escalating.