

# Executive Summary

July 2009

## Introduction

**Thank you for your interest in this report, which details the findings of the first phase of LVSC's Big Squeeze campaign.**

We believe London's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has an enormous role to play in helping Londoners through the recession. This identifies the impacts on Londoners and the groups that serve them, demonstrates the role of the VCS and makes some common sense recommendations about what should happen next.



The recession is already having severe impacts on London. We think that chief amongst these is that the most marginalised are becoming even more so. We see this through a well-documented increase in demand for VCS services – initially for advice and volunteer brokerage, but increasingly within wider services around the general relief of poverty. Our case study with the Universal Beneficent Society for example demonstrates this changing nature of the services individuals are asking for, and the sharp intensification of that need.

LVSC fundamentally believes those who are most marginalised are best served by local organisations with a sensitive, informed approach. That's why one of our case studies Family Action – a national organisation of 140 years' experience working in 17 boroughs – work directly with VCS groups to verify the emergency grant applications they receive, speeding up their awards processes for the most vulnerable.

This report also opens up a fresh debate about the secondary, psychological effects of the recession. One illustration comes from our case study with FORWARD – a pan-London and international African Diaspora organisation concerned with the sexual reproductive rights of African women and girls. Forward's research has highlighted anxieties fuelled by men in their communities

being hard-pressed to remain in work and becoming dependent on khat (a chewed stimulant).

Much of our research also demonstrates the ways in which groups are adapting to the changing economic climate. LVSC's specialist employment advice service PEACe has seen calls around restructuring and redundancy more than double in the first half of 2009 compared to last year.

But the recession also brings positive opportunities for London's VCS groups. We welcome the new focus on volunteer brokerage, although we argue that supporting employability is not the only public good such services bring. The experience of Greenwich Volunteer Centre echoes many across London. They report unprecedented increases in volunteering enquiries, but have encountered difficulties in accessing Government funding.

And echoing many respondents to our survey, we fear the situation is only going to get worse. Following the first wave of the recession the next few years will likely see significant public spending cuts – whichever political party is in power. Already LVSC is receiving double the number of calls from VCS groups looking to cut back on their services through restructure, variation to contracts or redundancy. This means fewer services for the most marginalised Londoners.

A real commitment and drive to work collaboratively with the VCS is therefore essential if we are going to minimise the impacts on Londoners, and come out of the recession collectively stronger.



Peter Lewis, Chief Executive



## About the Big Squeeze

The Big Squeeze is both a research project and campaign focusing on the value of the London's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) during the recession. This report is a summary of work undertaken between January and June 2009. It is both a narrative on the VCS experience and an insight into the communities for whom VCS groups are working. We hope this report also acts as a reference document, effective signposting tool and planning aid for all sectors as we move into the next phase of recession.

## What the campaign sought to achieve

This report collates the learning and impact from phase 1 of the Big Squeeze campaign. The initial aims of the campaign were:

- To begin to map the impact of the recession on London's communities and the VCS groups that serves them; and
- To raise the profile of the contribution VCS groups make to Londoners during the recession, with funders and public sector partners.

## Headline results

Our survey focused on four key questions:

- **Is the recession affecting the communities you work with?**  
95% said yes
- **Has your workload increased due to the recession?**  
71% said yes
- **Are you confident you will be able to meet increases in demand now and in the future?**  
80% said no
- **Is your organisation already taking action to help survive a recession?**  
78% said yes

## Methodology

The evidence and analysis used in this report is drawn from the following bases:

- **The Big Squeeze survey:** a (primarily) web-based survey of London VCS groups that ran from January – March (inclusive) 2009. Additional freepost hardcopy questionnaires were distributed at LVSC's office, via

every Council for Voluntary Service in London and via all members of the London Regional Change Up Consortium.

- **Commissioned case studies:** LVSC commissioned case studies from six respondents to the Big Squeeze survey, to provide a greater depth of understanding of the issues being faced by groups. The full case studies are available as a single document on the [LVSC website](#).
- **Direct outreach:** LVSC undertook a series of direct outreach visits to engage key networks, forums and individual groups in the key themes of the research. This provided much anecdotal evidence and enabled us to crosscheck key themes and experiences.
- **Desk-based research:** Undertaken within the LVSC Policy and Networks Team to provide additional local, national and strategic context to the report.

## About LVSC

London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) is the strategic umbrella organisation for the VCS in London. We bring together London VCS organisations to learn and share best practice and to create a co-ordinated voice to influence policy makers and statutory partners. We provide up-to-date support services for VCS groups around their business, policy analysis and influence and training for those working in the sector.

LVSC will celebrate its centenary in 2010 and is currently consulting on a new strategic plan for 2010-15, which seeks to refocus our agenda on poverty, inequality and environmental sustainability. For more information please visit [www.lvsc.org.uk/strategyconsultation](http://www.lvsc.org.uk/strategyconsultation).

**Our thanks to supporters of The Big Squeeze campaign and  
LVSC's Policy and Research work**

