

Appendix 2: Learning Case Study

Summary

1. This learning case study demonstrates the issues faced during Covid-19 by organisations you support and highlights ways they are adapting their services and approaches. The purpose of these case studies is to identify good practice that CBT, and others, can learn from during this crisis period and as the sector starts to rebuild.
2. This case study focuses on Interlink Foundation, which you awarded £250,000 over five years in October 2019 under Bridging Divides. The grant funds the running costs of their project supporting capacity building and resilience amongst Charedi organisations (strictly orthodox Jewish); partnership and collaboration with other sectors and communities in North London; and training and development for community leadership. Interlink also received £44,007 through the LCRF as part of Wave 3 of the London Community Response to cover the staff costs of translating and disseminating culturally-appropriate Covid information.
3. This report draws on information provided in Interlink's Impact and Learning report and an interview with their Chief Executive Chaya Spitz. Interlink Foundation's website is: <https://www.interlink-foundation.org.uk/>, their address is: Fourth Floor Offices, 97 Stamford Hill, London, N16 5DN and their BBGM reference 15169.

What made Interlink Foundation unique before the crisis?

4. Interlink Foundation is an infrastructure organisation which supports charities working with London's Charedi community. They have a membership of 200 Orthodox Jewish-led organisations, in addition to non-Charedi associate members such as representatives from Hackney Council.
5. Interlink began as a grassroots, needs-led organisation in the 1990s and continues to hold to its original values of being community-focused and championing interfaith empowerment. Their Chief Executive says, *"I still hold onto the story of how we were founded because it shows our values of community empowerment but also cross-community and interfaith sharing ... there is not a dichotomy between empowering specific communities and community cohesion, they actually both happen together."*
6. Interlink's community-facing services include consultancy, training, capacity-building and legal, accreditation and governance support for Charedi organisations. Interlink also coordinates and manages consortia for member organisations to work together on joint funding bids and has helped them secure approximately £300,000 of contracts per year. They also facilitate information sharing and networking across the Charedi sector.
7. Interlink's more outward-facing work involves building connections between the Charedi community and external organisations, to promote community voice

and bring different stakeholders together to share in joint problem solving and community support. This is what much of CBT's funding has been dedicated to over the last 18 months, as their Chief Executive explains: *"Helping the community to organise, bringing partners from outside the community and joint, effective, shared problem solving. There seems to be a real increase in understanding that to solve the problems communities face, the community itself needs to be involved."*

8. One example of this is their work with Sunbeams, a small grassroots organisation providing mentoring and befriending services to Charedi girls. Interlink had already acted as an incubator for Sunbeams, supporting them with their governance, legal requirements, accreditation and quality assurance processes. They then supported them to secure and deliver Hackney Council's contract for mental health support in Charedi schools, working with the local authority and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) to pilot an approach that parallels the offer in mainstream schools but is effective for its specific cultural context.
9. Their Chief Executive highlights the importance of the work: *"Had this not happened, either you'd have had all these thousands of children simply not benefitting from these services, or you would have had CAMHS and the local authority trying to do it themselves and being very frustrated, not getting why it's not working, because they don't have the right networks."*
10. Interlink played a crucial role, not only in helping Sunbeams develop but also using its connections to bring together expertise from the community and the local authority, ensuring that the initiatives were effective: *"On the back of longstanding trusted relationships, the local authority and us knowing each other, we're able to bring the right people in contact with each other and have the doggedness to spend a year developing this."*

How has Covid-19 affected Interlink Foundation?

11. The London Charedi community was hit particularly hard by the virus, with one of the highest infection rates in the world at 64%, compared to the UK average of 7%.¹ Interlink's Chief Executive says they had already seen a breakdown in trust across society, influenced by Brexit and social media, and the stresses of the pandemic further intensified this. Views around issues such as the Covid vaccine were particularly contentious. This meant Interlink had to work doubly hard to maintain the community's trust, whilst also supporting its members to adapt and meet demand: *"It makes it more emotionally difficult to work when you face that kind of hostility and challenge, that can be really difficult."*
12. On the positive side, however, the pandemic led to growing understanding from local authorities and other external organisations of the importance of working with the local community. Their Chief Executive says, *"I think somehow Covid has sharpened the recognition that the communities have the solutions, and we need to work with them to make them happen."*

13. Many of Interlink's member organisations were unable to provide their services; for instance Sunbeams' work was put on hold for nine months as schools closed and organisations pivoted to crisis response. However, the increased awareness of mental health issues during the pandemic meant that when schools did reopen, there was a greater appetite and support for the project.

How did Interlink Foundation adapt its provision?

14. Knowing the importance of earning and maintaining the community's trust, particularly during such a difficult time, Interlink used the funding they received from LCRF to diversify their team to include speakers of different community languages. This was crucial to their ability to communicate effectively with different parts of the community around Covid support, guidelines and needs. As a women-led organisation, they were also careful to ensure male voices were heard and that they recognised their own limits in representing the wider community. This self-reflectiveness meant they were able to continue acting as a trusted convener in bringing people together and ensuring people received the support they needed.
15. Their Chief Executive explains: *"One of the pieces of learning for us has been about our own community comms, we haven't rested on our laurels... No community is homogenous, there are different groups within it, there are some people who are better reached by different community languages."*
16. Interlink also moved their training and services online. Although this presented some challenges and exposed the limits of their IT system, it also enabled them to do more training for organisations than they could before.

What made Interlink Foundation particularly resilient during Covid-19?

17. As their Chief Executive points out, it is not only during Covid but throughout its history that Interlink has demonstrated its resilience, continuing despite the many challenges infrastructure organisations face: *"So many other infrastructure organisations have folded. When we started there was a really vibrant BME infrastructure sector and all of that became rationalised."*
18. Much of Interlink's success comes from their deep understanding of the different needs of the community, their commitment to building productive relationships and their dedication to earning the trust of all those involved. Their work to maintain this during the pandemic and to reach people with different languages exemplifies this ethos and their unique position at the intersection of the public and community sectors.
19. Their Chief Executive explains: *"There is something very delicate about the community's belief in you, that you're there for them, fighting their corner, that you're extraordinarily careful about conflicts of interest. Once you've got the community's trust you become a kind of gift for the public sector and for the wider society, because there are many people out there who have got such an*

appetite to work together and to build bridges, but they need to feel confident that they're building bridges with the right people."

What can City Bridge Trust learn from Interlink Foundation?

20. Interlink Foundation is a powerful example of the importance of infrastructure organisations, in incubating grassroots organisations, facilitating cross-sector collaboration and enabling community empowerment. CBT should continue its support of infrastructure organisations and consider how best to develop this in different communities.
21. Interlink's experience also shows that it takes time and commitment to build effective relationships and collaborative working. CBT's provision of five-year grants is helpful in enabling this to evolve, and CBT could also consider additional ways to support such longer-term work.
22. Interlink's success depends partly on its recognition that no community is homogenous and that communications and services need to be tailored to different groups; CBT could consider how best to identify and meet different needs within communities, as well as across them.
23. Lastly, Interlink highlights the importance of listening to and understanding the community they support; CBT should recognise this in its own work and dedicate time to developing its understanding of the different communities it exists to serve. As Interlink's Chief Executive says, *"Make sure that you keep your ear to the ground and don't ever lose your community's trust and faith."*

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