

Not Just For A Crisis

Evaluation of the Inverclyde Community Action Response Group (ICARG)

August 2020



About this Report

This report presents the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit's (SPIRU)¹ appraisal of the work of the Inverclyde Community Action Response Group (ICARG)² during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. ICARG was the alliance of thirteen local organisations, which took responsibility for the home delivery of food and other essential goods to the citizens of Inverclyde, and the introduction of other key services to meet their needs, from mid-March to the end of July 2020.

About this Evaluation

SPIRU has no vested interest in the work of ICARG; this is an independent appraisal. SPIRU is well positioned to undertake this evaluation, having acquired an understanding of the issues surrounding food security in Inverclyde and beyond: SPIRU has recently completed a nationwide review of local action to tackle food insecurity during the coronavirus crisis,³ gained an understanding of the local food landscape through an on-going independent evaluation of the work of Belville Community Garden,⁴ and is involved in independent postgraduate research on food citizenship in Inverclyde⁵.

SPIRU is an interdisciplinary research group based at Glasgow Caledonian University, which often works in partnership with other stakeholders to investigate and develop effective responses to poverty and inequality in Scotland and beyond. We are committed to advancing GCU's mission to promote the Common Good and the University's research aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. SPIRU contributes to these ambitions through applied research, policy analysis and engaging with policy makers, campaign groups and community stakeholders.

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Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

About This Evaluation

This is an independent appraisal by the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) of the work of the Inverclyde Community Action Response Group (ICARG). SPIRU was invited to undertake this evaluation on July 1st 2020, starting this work on July 6th, presenting a draft report on July 22nd, and a final report in August 2020. Professor McKendrick managed the evaluation, supervising the fieldwork that was undertaken by Jed Graham, a postgraduate research student within the Unit. The evaluation is based on an analysis of ICARG documentation, eight telephone interviews with leading figures within organisations that are part of the ICARG collective, and written responses to ad-hoc queries that we raised. The conclusions reached are independent.

What did we know at the outset of this evaluation?

- **Inverclyde's existing vulnerability.** Inverclyde has more than its fair share of Scotland's deprivation. With an ageing and declining population, and a location that is on the margins of the Glasgow City Region, it faces a challenge to reverse its fortunes and become one of the Scotland's 21st century success stories.
- **The scale of the challenge that coronavirus presents.** The COVID-19 Crisis has challenged national and local governments, many of whom were financially and strategically unprepared or underprepared for such a debilitating crisis.
- **The impact of coronavirus on Inverclyde.** There is evidence that Inverclyde has fared less well during the crisis, relative to other parts of Scotland.
- **Inverclyde's assets.** The third sector plays an important role in supporting the people of Inverclyde. A range of community organisations – some well established, others of more recent origin, play a key role in promoting wellbeing and security in Inverclyde.

What did we find – what worked?

SPIRU concludes that:

- **ICARG Delivers.** The range and importance of the services created and offered by the partnership is commendable. Across food delivery, mental health support, and provision of other material support, ICARG's interventions provided critical support, keeping individuals and families afloat during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Meeting Basic Needs and Facilitating Inclusion and Participation.** The core contribution of ICARG services was the delivery of food support, meeting this basic need. However, as the pandemic progressed, ICARG extended the range of interventions in ways that also facilitated inclusion and participation (such as the delivery of computing equipment to school-aged children).
- **Building on Pre-Existing Strengths.** The ICARG partnership was able to draw on the expertise and personal leadership skills of its lead partners, and their wider experience across business and social enterprise.
- **Nimble and Responsive.** ICARG was quick to organise and provide the Inverclyde public with essential services from the earliest stages of the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Pragmatic and Action-Oriented.** Although minutes were recorded, meetings were focused on action. Similarly, the approach taken by ICARG to utilise volunteer labour was fit for purpose. In effect, a 'two-tier' approach was adopted with only volunteers who already had a PVG being tasked to work directly with residents, and the remainder providing key 'background' support as runners/checkers.

- **Non-hierarchical.** Working within the partnership and engagements with the wider public were non-hierarchical, encouraging and facilitating sharing of resources, ideas and opinion.
- **Independent Work in Partnership.** The partnership did not undermine the autonomy of its members, some of whom continued to offer services, independently of ICARG. However, being part of a collective was reported to have heightened awareness of what services were available among partners, leading to improved signposting to users of what was available from other organisations.
- **Externally Engaged.** A fundamental strength of ICARG was its ability to advertise, communicate, and market itself to the Inverclyde public. The strength of ICARG's communications meant that many community-minded citizens were able to offer volunteer labour through ICARG.
- **Internally Connected.** The internal group communications and collaboration platform were used extensively and effectively, to ensure that partners were kept abreast of on-going developments in a field that was often fast-moving.

What did we find – what worked less well?

SPIRU concludes that:

- **Intelligence on Reach.** The evidence available shows the number of people in receipt of ICARG services and provisions, However, there is no data to demonstrate whether the most disadvantaged, most deprived and most needy were the primary recipients.
- **Intelligence on Volunteers.** At the outset, many new volunteers commenced work with incomplete records being maintained of their skillset, and background information. When this was recognised, the Salvation Army volunteer process was used to improve records. This would have been desirable from the outset.
- **Intelligence on Resourcing.** Full accounts should be produced in the spirit of transparency and good faith, and to appraise whether this represents best value.

What needs to happen now?

- **Mixed Mode Futures.** Statutory bodies and Third Sector partners should now be better equipped to respond to public health crises. However, at current levels of local government funding, citizens will not be able to receive all the support required from statutory bodies alone. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the need to appraise afresh ways in which local government could work with Third Sector partners to attend to local needs.
- **Tackling Root Cause in Inverclyde.** The work of ICARG has highlighted the scale of the often-hidden challenges that present in Inverclyde. A sharper focus is required on the underlying issues that led to the COVID-19 crisis being particularly challenging in Inverclyde.
- **Continuing to Meet Need Beyond COVID?** Many of the services offered by ICARG would be of value to citizens beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Consideration might be given as to whether ICARG – or one of its partners – should assume responsibility to continue with this work.
- **Exit Strategy.** Of more immediate concern is that the work may have encouraged a dependency/reliance on services which cannot be maintained with existing resource. ICARG should consider how to support users in the transition away from provision by ICARG's partners.
- **Nurturing Local Leaders.** ICARG demonstrated the importance of local leaders. There is a local talent pool that could be nurtured and utilised more effectively, to promote the common good.
- **Examination of the ICARG Model.** The 'ICARG' model of working should be clearly specified (reflecting on the drivers of 'worked well', in order to distinguish it from alternatives, to identify its strengths/weaknesses, and to explore whether this should be replicated by others.
- **Reflective Learning.** Although this report has shared some reflections on ICARG, there is scope to extend this activity. From the solid ground of 'good work was done', comes the security that such reflection does not constitute a threat or a challenge. We encourage an openness and transparency among ICARG partners when reflecting on their experiences.

Inverclyde: In and Out of Crisis

Introducing Inverclyde

Inverclyde is situated in west central Scotland and is one of the smallest local authorities in Scotland, both by size⁶ and by population⁷.

Historically part of the county of Renfrewshire, it was formerly a district within Strathclyde Region (1975 to 1996), before becoming a unitary authority under local government reorganisation in 1996.

It is part of the wider Glasgow City Region, a collection of eight largely urban local authorities in west central Scotland with a combined population approaching two million people. As part of this collective, it is a partner in the Glasgow City Deal, formally signed in August 2014,⁸ which is a twenty year programme to regenerate the wider region and support economic growth.

Largely urbanised, to a lesser extent it also comprises small towns that are accessible to larger urban areas and what is described as 'accessible rural areas'.⁹ More than one half of Inverclyde's population live in Greenock, the largest town in a conurbation that includes Port Glasgow and Gourock. Beyond the urban conurbation, the largest towns and villages are Kilmacolm, Inverkip and Wemyss Bay.¹⁰

Inverclyde: 21st Century challenges

As with other parts of west central Scotland, but often more than most, Inverclyde has challenges to overcome if it is to prosper in the 21st Century.

Its geographical location, historically its greatest asset, now positions Inverclyde as marginal in its regional context. Nevertheless, it sits in close proximity to Glasgow Airport with road and rail links to the city of Glasgow and the wider Glasgow City Region beyond.

Inverclyde is one of the few areas in Scotland, and in particular one of the few urban areas in Scotland, to have a declining population.¹¹ Over the last twenty years, the population of Inverclyde has fallen by 9.4%, a loss of over 8,000 people, the greatest in Scotland, at a time when the population of Scotland has risen by 7.6%. Inverclyde's population is estimated to have fallen every single year over this period. This population decline is projected to continue over the next decade, with the expectation of a 6.1% decrease, reducing Inverclyde's population to less than 74,000.

Since the millennium, the number of households in Inverclyde has increased by 2.6% (despite population decline).¹² On the other hand, this rate of household growth is much lower in Inverclyde than in other parts of Scotland (average growth of 12.9% over the same period). Lone adult households are most common in Inverclyde (44.2% of all households). This household type is expected to increase by 7.6% over the next decade, while two adult households with children and households with three or more adults are expected to be less common (falls of 18.3% and 9.8% are projected, respectively).

As with the rest of Scotland, Inverclyde's population is also ageing.¹³ Although those in 'late middle age' remain the most populous age group (45-64), there has been a significant increase in the proportion of older citizens (a 24% increase in the 75 and over age group since 1998). Notably, the proportion of younger adults (25-44 year olds) has fallen by 29.1% over the same period.

Inverclyde has the third highest standardised death rate in Scotland (12.3 people per 1,000 population).¹⁴ The most common causes of death for men are heart diseases (15.6% of deaths), dementia and Alzheimers disease

(9.5%), and lung-related disease (6.7%). For women, the main causes are dementia and Alzheimer disease (16.6%), respiratory diseases (8.6%) and heart disease (7.6%). On the other hand, and although lower than the Scottish average and with no notable improvements in the last few years, contemporary life expectancy at birth is now much higher for both men and women than it was at the start of the 21st Century (75.2 years for men; and 79.6 years for women).

Inverclyde also has more than its fair share of people living in multiply deprived areas. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020 ranks Scotland's 6976 small areas– or datazones in terms of deprivation, taking into account the area's profile in terms of income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing. Approaching one half of Inverclyde's small areas are considered to be among the 20% Most Deprived in Scotland (44.7%), with one small part of Greenock Town Centre being ranked the very most deprived area in Scotland in 2020.^{15 16}

Scotland in the Crisis¹⁷

The world has been grappling with coronavirus (COVID-19) for much of 2020.¹⁸ On March 1st, the first positive case was confirmed in Scotland. The first case of community transition in Scotland that was unrelated to travel, was identified on the same day that the World Health Organisation declared the virus a pandemic (March 11th); the first death in Scotland attributed to COVID-19 followed two days later. 'Lockdown' started on March 24th, with the move to the first phase of moving out of lockdown beginning on May 29th, the move to its second phase introduced on June 19th and the move to its third phase on July 10th.

As noted by McKendrick and Campbell (2020)¹⁹, on March 18th 2020, the Scottish Government announced a £350 million package to support people in need in Scotland.²⁰ This fund comprises eight funding streams, the largest sum of which was the £70 million that was allocated to the Food Fund. The Food Fund comprises three elements:

- £30 million of support to local authorities, for 'structured public sector responses working with local resilience partnerships', with each of Scotland's 32 local authorities receiving financial support to tackle food insecurity within their district.
- £30 million set aside for a national programme to deliver food to the shielded group (those unable to leave their home due to high clinical risk)
- £10 million set aside for investment in third sector organisations that are responding both at a national and at a local level.²¹

Support to promote food security is also available, either directly or indirectly, through the seven other funding streams.

Inverclyde in the Crisis

At the time of writing, according to the Scottish Government, there have been 116 deaths in Inverclyde that have been attributed to COVID 19, with 13 of these outwith institutions, 39 in care homes, and 64 in hospitals.²²

As reported widely in the national²³ and local²⁴ press in May 2020, citizens of some parts of Inverclyde were described as being those most at risk of coronavirus in Scotland.

From 16th March 2020, Inverclyde Council has published a daily briefing to highlight local action related to management of the coronavirus crisis.²⁵ By way of illustration, the daily briefing of Tuesday 21st July reported on:

- Funding secured by Inverclyde Council to improve social distancing
- Information for business on the UK government's 'Eat out to Help out' scheme
- Opening of a new national wellbeing helpline and online hub to support health and social care staff
- News on the opening of the Book of Remembrance at Gourock Crematorium
- News on the reopening of public toilets
- News on the opening of Gourock Walled Gardens and Pets Corner

As part of these briefings an invite was extended to all local organisations to share their update on activity being undertaken in response to the crisis. Charlene Elliot as CEO of CVS, a partner in the ICARG activities, took

responsibility to update the resilience meetings of Inverclyde Council on the work of ICARG and to channel requests from ICARG for support to this group. ICARGs work was reported in several of these briefings.²⁶

Winds of change: Social Action and Poverty in Scotland

Introduction

As with other parts of Scotland, both local government and the Third Sector play key roles in providing regular, emergency and crisis support to the citizens of Inverclyde.

Local government in Scotland

Local Government bodies in Scotland have undergone sustained fiscal pressure for the past decade.²⁷ Audit Scotland identified that Scottish Government revenue funding to local councils has reduced in real terms from 2013/14 to 2020/21 by 3.3%.²⁸

However, since 2017/18 it has seen an increase by 3.9% in real terms, to £10.7 billion in 2020/21.²⁹ These figures do not include additional funding made available in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inverclyde's 2019/20 Council Budget was set at £190m, with savings of almost £7m agreed over the next two years. These savings included the agreed loss of nearly 58 jobs.³⁰

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by Inverclyde Council it remains a key provider of local services and is at the heart of Inverclyde's Community Planning Partnership.³¹

Tackling Poverty in Scotland

Poverty is not falling in Scotland. All age groups experienced an increase in poverty in the last five years (between 2011-14 and 2016-19).³² Over one million individuals in Scotland are living in households regarded as experiencing 'relative poverty' (60 per cent below median equivalised household income at current levels, after housing costs have been deducted) at the current time. In the last five years, the number considered to be living

in relative poverty (after housing costs) increased by 20,000 for children, 40,000 for working-age adults, and 30,000 for people of pensionable age.

The latest data, for 2016-19, show that after housing costs are taken into account, almost one in four of Scotland's children live in poverty (24 per cent, or 230,000 children). Child poverty is also persistent; during 2014-18, one in six children in Scotland had lived in persistent poverty (17 per cent).

End Child Poverty estimates that one in every four children in Inverclyde is living in poverty, one of the highest risk rates in Scotland, and rising to almost one in three for some wards (districts) within Inverclyde.³³

Inverclyde Council, in meeting its obligations to the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, now prepares an annual Local Child Poverty Action Report to describe what actions it is taking to work toward the eradication of child poverty in Inverclyde by 2030.³⁴

Tackling Food Insecurity in Scotland

Food insecurity is running out of food, due to a lack of money or other resources.³⁵

As noted in McKendrick and Campbell (2020)³⁶, reducing food insecurity is one of the ways in which the Scottish Government measures whether or not "Scotland Performs".³⁷ In July 2018, food insecurity was added to the list of (now 81) Indicators that work toward achieving the eleven National Outcomes that are part of Scotland's National Performance Framework.³⁸ With the status of a national indicator, the Scottish Government is committed to measure whether Scotland is making progress in tackling food insecurity and – together with local government, businesses, voluntary organisations and people living in Scotland – to take action to

make this happen.³⁹ Food insecurity is one of seven indicators that together allow Scotland to appraise whether progress is being made toward tackling poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.⁴⁰

Almost one in ten adults in Scotland (9%), report that, at sometime over the last year, they were worried about running out of food, because of a lack of money or other resources.⁴¹ Furthermore, it was self-reported that the same lack of money or resources, also led to 6% of adults eating less than they should, and 3% of adults running out of food. Globally, it is estimated that 820 million people regularly go to bed hungry.⁴²

Social Action in Scotland

According to the founding document of Social Action Inquiry Scotland,⁴³ *“Social action happens in civil society. We are all civil society – whenever and however we come together as citizens to take social action – informally and formally – outwith the state and the market. People come together to help improve their lives and create responses to the issues that are important in them. Social action can empower citizens, support people and complement public services. It can challenge, or bypass vested interests. It benefits both individuals and communities.”*

The Social Action Inquiry is being advanced collectively by Carnegie UK Trust, Corra Foundation, the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), The National Lottery Community Fund and The Robertson Trust, working to achieve the vision of: *“A Scotland where social action is valued and is able to make change happen in communities.”*⁴⁴

Social action has been central to Scotland’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.⁴⁵ With the immanent launch of the Social Action Inquiry Scotland in the autumn, it is an opportune moment to evaluate the work of ICARG, a collective that represents what social action seeks to encourage.

Social Action in Inverclyde

CVS Inverclyde is the Third Sector Interface for Inverclyde.⁴⁶ Grounded in a commitment to support local groups to enable citizens and communities to speak and act on their own behalf, CVS Inverclyde offers a range of services to support the sector including providing funding through the Inverclyde Community Fund, enabling groups to draw on a pool of community experts, recognising excellence through the Inverclyde Community Awards, providing a forum for groups to discuss common interests and share experience, sharing news through Inverclyde Community News, and offering office services, and consultancy, and providing advice and support.⁴⁷

There are over 600 third sector organisations in Inverclyde and many were active during the pandemic, although most are understood to have closed down and/or transitioned into a working from home business model during the pandemic.

The functions of ICARG overlap with many of those of CVS. In the context of an emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic, this overlap did not have material effect on either group. This will not present a problem as Inverclyde emerges from the initial phase of the coronavirus pandemic, as ICARG ceased operations on 31st July 2020.

Inverclyde Community Action Response Group: An Introduction

Introduction

In this section of the report, we introduce the work of the ICARG partnership, describing its mission, history and partners, in addition to providing some metrics on the nature and scale of its work, since it delivered its first set of food boxes on March 15th 2020.

History

Stephen Henry established the Inverclyde Community Action Response Group (ICARG) on 14th March 2020. At this time, there was growing concern about the speed and scale at which the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading, and the impact this would have on vulnerable citizens. Media reports were describing how some nation states were becoming overwhelmed by the virus, and fears were growing that the UK would follow.

Louise Hunter (Co-founder of ICARG) and Stephen Henry (Co-founder of ICARG) were key to the formation of the partnership. Both hold 'executive' roles within the organisation. Unbeknown to each other beforehand, and independently at the outset, both began liaising with local businesses and community groups at the beginning of the crisis, before making a connection through Charlene Elliot of CVS Inverclyde, who had similar conversations with both of them beforehand.

The following outlines the chronology of the development of ICARG⁴⁸:

- 07/03 Stephen Henry (SH) lands at Edinburgh Airport. No test, track/trace procedures are in place
- 13/03 First Scottish Covid-19 death
- 14/03 ICARG founded – Separate side conversations between CVS and SH/Louise Hunter (LH)
- 15/03 'Call to action' emails to Gourock

elected members, Inverclyde Community Councils and third sector organisations – social media platforms in place.

- 16/03 First (and only) face to face meeting held involving Laura Reilly (Belville), Gwyneth MacDonald (Mind Mosaic) Vicky Clooney (CVS) and Louise McCammond (HSCP)
- 17/03 Stephen Henry & Louise Hunter connect
- 18/03 First audio meeting – Alison Bunce (Compassionate Inverclyde) and Charlene Elliot (CVS) join
- 20/03 Second Audio meeting – Karen Haldane joins (YourVoice)
- 24/03 Calls move to Zoom, Lynn Foreman (Covid-19 team leaders) joins. Trello Boards start. Ronnie Cowan (MP) & Stephen McCabe (Elected leader of the Council) join the volunteers.
- 27/03 Louise McVey (Inverclyde Council) engaged
- 28/03 Ian Arthur (Salvation Army) joins
- 31/03 WhatsApp group starts
- 02/04 Allan Johnstone (The Trust) joins
- 06/04 Willie Wilson (Branchton CC) joins
- 07/04 I58 foodbank engagement
- 08/04 Kevin Rodgers (Inverkip Hub) joins
- 09/04 Sharon Gemmell (Parklea branching out) engagement and joins the WhatsApp group

Prior to Louise Hunter being introduced to Stephen Henry by Charlene Elliot, she had held discussions with the local branch of The Salvation Army, after they reached out to her through a mutual connection – their butcher shop. The Salvation Army leader, Ian Arthur, had been made aware that Louise had been asking local businesses if they needed any support during the crisis, and then called her to discuss local coordination.

Both Louise and Stephen agreed that they were **“coming from the exact same place”** and efforts were made to reach out to others who came to form the core structure of ICARG, including Gwyneth MacDonald (Mind Mosaic Counselling and Therapy) and Laura Reilly (Belville Community Gardens Trust).

Stephen Henry continued to hold discussions with CVS Inverclyde, Louise McVey (Head of the Inverclyde’s Community Planning Partnership), Karen Haldane (Your Voice) and Alison Bunce (Compassionate Inverclyde), including them in his plans to coordinate a third sector response.

As more partners were included by Stephen and Louise’s networking, ICARG was able to expand its remit. This led one ICARG member to portray it as **“a pop-up organisation that was there to quickly react to the needs to people living in Inverclyde”**.

An example of this fluidity was the ‘Show of Strength’ campaign, which began on June 25th. As described in project documentation⁴⁹, the project is described as *“starting with the realization of a problem in offering compassionate outreach services in the Inverclyde areas during the Covid-19 crisis. People – and elderly men in particular – are too proud to pick up the phone and ask for help – even though they genuinely need it. There’s a sense of ‘somebody else will need the help more than I do – It’ll be ok.” We wanted to create a campaign with a wide reach across traditional and digital media channels that would combat the stigma associated with asking for help. In particular, we want to make sure that those that need help with getting food, their prescriptions, or someone to talk to about their mental health have the ability to get it – and feel good about doing so.”*

Mission

ICARG has no official mission statement, however its Twitter account states that the group was, **“setup to enable the local community to collaborate and provide**

services to help deal with the coronavirus outbreak”. Further to this, the group’s Facebook account adds that ICARG was, **“created in response to the current Coronavirus pandemic, bringing local organisations and people together, enabling the Community of Inverclyde to collaborate around the challenges and an opportunity to deliver the services needed to the community at their time of most need - especially for those who have to self-isolate or socially exclude themselves.”**

As the severity of the crisis became more apparent, there was growing concern that third sector organisations would be **“falling over one another trying to help”**. The main concern of the parties as a collective was to ensure the efficient and equitable distribution of third sector services, such as food distribution, prescription delivery, and mental health checks, across Inverclyde.

Each member of the partnership worked within their own organisational remit. Partners fulfilled functions that ‘played to their strengths’. One ICARG member noted that their response would be **“everything that I would be doing and have done through COVID is what I would be doing”** had the partnership not formed. This may be a broad reference to **‘providing whatever support is needed in the form that is required’**. However, this is not true of the partnership as a whole. ICARG was delivering new services, which were tailored to the crisis and the demand it created. An example of this would be the prepared meal delivery, which was a collaborative effort between Belville Community Garden Trust, Branchton Community Centre, local business ‘Café Continental’, and the Salvation Army.

Partners

ICARG comprises thirteen partners:

- The Belville Gardens Community Trust⁵⁰;
- Branchton Community Centre⁵¹;
- Café Continental⁵²;
- Communities and the Voluntary Sector Inverclyde⁵³;

- Compassionate Inverclyde⁵⁴;
- COVID-19 Volunteers⁵⁵;
- Inverclyde Community Development Trust⁵⁶;
- Inverkip Hub⁵⁷;
- Mind Mosaic Counselling and Therapy⁵⁸;
- The Salvation Army⁵⁹;
- Your Voice Inverclyde⁶⁰;
- River Clyde Homes⁶¹;
- Co-Op Eldon Street⁶².

This is a small sub-set of third sector organisations in Inverclyde.

Metrics

The first output was delivered on March 15th. Over the next three months, until July 10th 2020, collectively, the group:⁶³

- delivered 4,059 food boxes via multiple partners within the group.
- delivered 27,232 meals
- delivered 95 'lifeline' grocery collections,
- delivered 1,070 prescriptions to those who were shielding or unable to access necessary transport.
- distributed 720 pieces of nightwear to hospitalised patients after a need was identified by one of the partners.
- placed 8,683 'keep in contact' calls to the public and vulnerable volunteers.
- placed 3,177 volunteer support calls, protecting the very people who are on the front line of ICARG.
- distributed 369 laptop and 4g dongles to Primary and Secondary school children,
- distributed 67 toiletry bags.

ICARG reported to us that over 37,000 volunteer hours were expended, equivalent to 5,521 volunteer days across all services by the end of July 2020.

Conclusion

The coordination of third sector operations was prioritised by the members to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, as the severity of the crisis looked set to engulf them as individual actors. As this introduction demonstrates, much was achieved in partnership over the critical period of March – July 2020.

ICARG In the COVID-19 Crisis

Introduction

In this section of the report, we appraise the work of the ICARG partnership during the coronavirus pandemic, drawing largely on the interviews with key officials. We identify twelve themes, each of which is discussed, with argument evidenced using extracts from the interviews (**highlighted in bold**).

ICARG Delivers

First and foremost, the scale and breadth of ICARG activity is acknowledged. As described in the metrics section of the previous chapter, ICARG were active, making many thousands of deliveries - primarily of food, but also of clothing, computing equipment and toiletries to those in hospital and the wider community in Inverclyde.

In addition to the material provisions, ICARG also fulfilled an important role in establishing and maintaining social contact with the wider public and its volunteers.

Collective Community Effort

The surge in demand for food, prescriptions, and other items required resourcing, both financially and through volunteer labour. ICARG members described the wider public response as being “**phenomenal**” and “**fantastic**”, highlighting this as being central to the success of their work. There was a clear understanding among the ICARG members that this was a broadly based community effort.

The volunteer labour was not only understood in terms of a resource that enabled ICARG to function. One member of ICARG commented that, “**human beings and human kindness has absolutely come to the fore**”. This speaks to wider agendas being developed in Scotland

(and beyond) to promote kinder communities in localities.⁶⁴

Resourcing

A total of £320,000 was secured through government grant funding, donations from the local public, local business donations, and donations from multinational corporations. Of this total, £100,000 came from a successful joint bid with River Clyde Homes and £40,000 of funding was successfully raised via public and private sector organisations, to support the prepared meal delivery service. £90,000 was raised by Belville Community Gardens Trust to combat digital poverty and the remaining £90,000 was distributed among the members by such grants as the Scottish Government’s Wellbeing Fund.

Self-evidently, finance was required to deliver the work. However, ICARG members were of the opinion that being able to access this funding was only possible in partnership, with one interviewee detailing how the size of output from ICARG meant that their case for funding would be stronger and it could obtain funds that “**other third sector organisations have been unable to access**”.

Evolving Mission and Purpose

Although there was no explicit mission statement of purpose, ICARG’s initial focus remained its core focus throughout – the provision of food to vulnerable people within Inverclyde.

However, as the pandemic progressed, the group began to receive feedback from members of the public of certain, specific issues – like nightwear for hospitalised patients – or general social issues that were being exacerbated – like mental health deterioration. Here, we see the role of ICARG moving beyond just co-ordination of service

to meet expressed need, to the creation of new services to meet emergent need.

This highlights the flexible nature of ICARG, and how it was able to adapt beyond their initial remit to include actions that were specific to the unfolding crisis.

Expertise & Leadership

One ICARG member described how it was Louise and Stephen's "**fire and drive and expertise**" that first established and then grew the partnership. This member noted that there was previously "**an intention to do this consortium**" between organisations in Inverclyde, and that it has "**unfortunately taken a pandemic to really accelerate that**" as a catalyst for the community cooperation.

Another ICARG member recognised that the demands placed on their own organisation (and therefore placed on themselves) were too much of a strain on their time during the crisis. It was considered beneficial to have executive roles within ICARG with experience in "**project management aspects**" that could "**oversee**" data collection and funding proposals, among other roles.

Strength in Diversity

A key strength of the partnership was considered to be the breadth of knowledge and practical expertise among its constituent members. Many of the leading figures in ICARG have decades worth of career experience in corporate governance, media, social work, and most notably for a public health crisis, nursing and healthcare.

This breadth of experience provided the space for organisations to focus on their particular strengths, while making a key contribution to the wider whole. For example, organisations with specific expertise, such as Compassionate Inverclyde and Mind Mosaic, were able to perform 'business as usual', while signposting users to other member partners with which they had become more aware through the partnership.

The diversity was not only a strength in terms of function. Diversity was thought to have generated a creative space for members to "**thrash out**" proposals and solutions. One member said that they felt able to "**bring up an issue and 'cause everyone was around the one table we got a solution**". Being able to reach decisions in a timely manner on key issues was identified as a strength by several partners.

On the other hand, some ICARG members were of the opinion that greater involvement of more statutory bodies or individuals with experience of statutory bodies would have strengthened the partnership. In particular, it was noted that there was a need for more legal expertise within the group.

Working Beyond ICARG

It was noted by one member that "**CVS did work in tandem**" with ICARG, but another member said that the relationship with CVS had been at points been "**sticky**". None of the interviewees felt that this had a material impact on service delivery. As with any team who form in a crisis – who must rapidly move through Tuckman's four stages of group development - 'forming, storming, norming and performing' - model, it is to be expected that there would be tensions in such periods of uncertainty in unprecedented times. Indeed, such tension can be productive – when the tensions enable all actors to find better solutions to challenges faced.

More generally, CVS was clearly an integral part of ICARG function, acting as an interface between ICARG and Inverclyde Council/HSCP. It had responsibility for the prescription collection service, in conjunction with Compassionate Inverclyde and volunteer drivers, with the flyer being created by ICARG and service need identified via ICARG and the Covid-19 volunteer teams.

Lifting People Up

Other than providing for the basic human needs of citizens for food and medication, the partnership also afforded opportunities for personal and skills development.

For example, 72 individuals have received trauma informed training and mental health first aid training (with an additional three fully booked training sessions in August) from Mind Mosaic Counselling and Therapy.

“Mental health we’re really worried about” said one member, in relation to issues caused by the lockdown. Another ICARG member noted that the training was also important to protect volunteers in the climate of what was understood to be a growth in suicides in the community: **“if you’re a volunteer who has signed up for this and you’re hearing this a lot that’s hard you know if you’re not trained for it.”** This service can be seen then as offering protection in two ways – to members of the public in exchanges with volunteers and for volunteer staff enabling them to deal with the realities that they confront.

Protection

Support was also provided in the form of grief and counselling to those in need of emotional support during the crisis.

This emotional need was the focus of the group’s activities concerning grief and loss. As noted in **‘Expertise & Leadership’**, the partnership had access to expertise and knowledge concerning mental health and wellbeing. Charities like Compassionate Inverclyde, Mind Mosaic, and the Salvation Army were all providing services focused on mental health, suicide prevention, and emotional support.

The ‘Sign of Strength’ campaign⁶⁵ was also a part of this initiative. The focus was to battle **“that whole kind of Shipyard, Clyde-side mentality”** as one member put it, and allow a simple service for people isolated and **“just want somebody to talk to”**.

Facilitating Social Inclusion and Tackling Learning Loss

As described in **‘metrics’**, 368 laptops and internet dongles were provided to school children, ensuring continued access to education. Research during the crisis has shown that school disruption has had a greater negative effect on children from deprived backgrounds, strengthening the need for equal access to education.⁶⁶

One member of the group discussed the issue with a local headteacher, who praised the efforts of ICARG and said, **“you don’t realize the effect that this has had on some children’s lives”**.

That same member of the group stressed the importance of young children having the means to converse with teachers and friends. **“you’ve just had no idea with some of the families how big a difference that’s made”** being able to have schoolwork marked, and to maintain contact with companions.

Effective and Responsive Communication

Many of the members involved noted how strong the communication links were with one another and also with the wider public – either through ICARG’s social media channels or through the COVID-19 Volunteers group⁶⁷. One interviewee commented that **“the way [ICARG] managed to market themselves and let the community know they’re there has been excellent.”** This public awareness even produced a moment when one member was greeted with a yell of **“GO ICARG!”** from a member of the public in a passing car. All members of the partnership shared similar stories of public sympathy and positivity toward the group and their efforts.

The unprecedented nature of the pandemic meant the partnership had often to be reactive to feedback about people’s needs. There was an understanding that statutory bodies **“could not have responded as quickly”**

and that ICARG had to **“step in and help those who were falling through the cracks”**.

The fundamental strength of the partnership’s organisation was its ability to be progressively proactive in the later stages of the crisis, while being able to be rapidly reactive in the beginning. This was achievable through as its function of a **“communication platform”**, as described by one member. This platform worked served two purposes; within the membership, members could discuss issues and solutions, and the group had the ability to interact with the wider public.

This two-way flow of information between public and ICARG accounts for much of the success of the group. ICARG was also well positioned to make creative interventions that further developed its brand recognition. One example of this was the group’s logo being projected onto local landmarks in Inverclyde. **“It got a huge amount of attention”** said an interviewee, they **“did something that’s never ever been done before here”**.

Utilising Social Media for Engaged Communication

The severity of the COVID-19 crisis led to increased traffic and heightened engagement on social media platforms. Embracing social media enabled ICARG to respond to demand, often in real time. The ‘COVID-19 Volunteers’ closed Facebook group was one example of this, where members of the public **“could put responses on and we had a team of volunteers for each area of Inverclyde which meant it was really speedy”**. More generally, ICARG was effective at sharing information. One member noted how requests would **“go out via ICARG and we would all share it”** in order to quickly attend to that need.

The use of platforms such as Facebook as a social organisational tool is reminiscent of political activist movements such as Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo Movement, or the events of the Arab Spring. Members of the public were able to share their needs, voice

their opinions, offer their labour and material items, search for services, and see the results of ICARG intervention and the interventions of its members. The public engagement with the partnership created the awareness, trust, and fuelled an activism that benefitted almost all areas of the group’s functions.

One member of the partnership noted how the ‘Sign of Strength’ campaign benefitted significantly from this online presence, **“it’s been shared and shared and shared again amongst all the community groups and individuals right throughout Inverclyde”**.

Conclusion

Many strengths of the ICARG partnership are apparent, all the more credible given that it emerged in the midst of the pandemic and with all the uncertainty that this brought. From a standing start, ICARG quickly progressed to meet the needs of the wider population of Inverclyde.

Such was the nature of the crisis, the group were inundated with concerned citizens and ‘good Samaritans’ who were willing and able to assist in the delivery of services or fund these services to the best of their ability.

ICARG and Inverclyde Futures

Introduction

There is emergent evidence and growing concern that Inverclyde's existing problems - scale of poverty, unemployment, food security, and poor mental health - will be extended to others and intensify for those who already experience them, as a result of the COVID crisis.

Scale and capacity

To look ahead may be daunting for many of the third sector organisations who have worked so hard during the crisis, who may have drained limited resources (material and psychological), and are likely to be facing significant challenges with only limited resources – especially those smaller, localised third sector organisations, unique to Inverclyde.

Organisational futures

Differences in opinion were expressed about how future challenges should be met – whether through the partnership, as individual organisations, or through statutory bodies. There is an awareness from some members that continued ICARG work in more 'regular' times could **"tread on people's toes"**. The majority seemed against the idea of becoming a constituted body, however the view was not unanimous. On the other hand, there was an opinion from many within the group that further coordination with statutory bodies was welcomed and inevitable.

Building Back Better

The ICARG Partnership concluded at the end of July 2020, in line with further easing of restrictions by the UK and Scottish Government. At this point, each member returned to their prerequisite core functions as a charity or business.

One legacy may be the direction that was envisaged by Louise Hunter and Stephen Henry in redirecting the focus of their social enterprise 'Creative Inverclyde', which they see as the enduring model for reinvigoration and proactive development in the area. The mission statement of this group states that they wish to **"utilise the creative sector to be the nucleus for positive social change across Inverclyde"**.

Future Crises

There is no consensus among ICARG members about the form that would be best placed to respond to any return of the coronavirus, or in response to any future crisis. Almost all accepted that if a secondary spike in infections occurred, then collaboration in **"a Cobra sort of committee"** was preferable, but still not as a constituted organisation.

One member offered the view that **"we could come together again very quickly and respond to a crisis if need be"**, but that this would be under the pretence of an extreme event – like COVID-19. **"The individuals that were at that table with a phone call could come together..."** said another member, when asked about the speed of reply to a further crisis.

Only of its time

On enduring issues such as tackling poverty and improving mental health, one ICARG member held the view that “**having another group of people just complicates things**” as coordinated responses were the primary function of statutory bodies such as Inverclyde Council, CVS Inverclyde, and the Health and Social Care Partnership. This was not a universal view, though. Another ICARG member felt that “**an underlying financial rumbling in the community**”, coupled with higher demand for mental health services could be the foundation for future work under the ICARG structure.

Conclusion

What is clear is that the future is unclear, both in terms of what lies ahead for Inverclyde and the wider nation in terms of the coronavirus, and in terms of what is considered to be the most productive way to continue with the work of ICARG.

Conclusion

What did we know at the outset?

- **Inverclyde's existing vulnerability.** Inverclyde has more than its fair share of Scotland's deprivation. With an ageing and declining population, and a location that is on the margins of the Glasgow City Region, it faces a challenge to reverse its fortunes and become one of the Scotland's 21st century success stories.
- **The scale of the challenge that coronavirus presents.** The COVID-19 Crisis has challenged national and local governments, many of whom were financially and strategically unprepared or underprepared for such a debilitating crisis.
- **The impact of coronavirus on Inverclyde.** There is evidence that Inverclyde has fared less well during the crisis, relative to other parts of Scotland.
- **Inverclyde's assets.** The third sector plays an important role in supporting the people of Inverclyde. A range of community organisations – some well-established, others of more recent origin, play a key role in promoting wellbeing and security in Inverclyde.

What did we find – what worked?

SPIRU concludes that:

- **ICARG Delivers.** The range and importance of the services created and offered by the partnership is commendable. Across food delivery, mental health support, and provision of other material support, ICARG's interventions provided critical support, keeping individuals and families afloat during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Meeting Basic Needs and Facilitating Inclusion and Participation.** The core contribution of ICARG services was the delivery of food support, meeting this basic need. However, as the pandemic progressed, ICARG extended the range of interventions in ways that also facilitated

inclusion and participation (such as the delivery of computing equipment to school-aged children).

- **Building on Pre-Existing Strengths.** The ICARG partnership was able to draw on the expertise and personal leadership skills of its lead partners, and their wider experience across business and social enterprise.
- **Nimble and Responsive.** ICARG was quick to organise and provide the Inverclyde public with essential services from the earliest stages of the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Pragmatic and Action-Oriented.** Although minutes were recorded, meetings were focused on action. Similarly, the approach taken by ICARG to utilise volunteer labour was fit for purpose. In effect, a 'two-tier' approach was adopted with only volunteers who already had a PVG being tasked to work directly with residents, and the remainder providing key 'background' support as runners/checkers.
- **Non-hierarchical.** Working within the partnership and engagements with the wider public were non-hierarchical, encouraging and facilitating sharing of resources, ideas and opinion.
- **Independent Work in Partnership.** The partnership did not undermine the autonomy of its members, some of whom continued to offer services, independently of ICARG. However, being part of a collective was reported to have heightened awareness of what services were available among partners, leading to improved signposting to users of what was available from other organisations.
- **Externally Engaged.** A fundamental strength of ICARG was its ability to advertise, communicate, and market itself to the Inverclyde public. The strength of ICARG's communications meant that many community-minded citizens were able to offer volunteer labour through ICARG.

- **Internally Connected.** The internal group communications and collaboration platform were used extensively and effectively, to ensure that partners were kept abreast of on-going developments in a field that was often fast-moving.

What did we find – what worked less well?

SPIRU concludes that:

- **Intelligence on Reach.** The evidence available shows the number of people in receipt of ICARG services and provisions, However, there is no data to demonstrate whether the most disadvantaged, most deprived and most needy were the primary recipients.
- **Intelligence on Volunteers.** At the outset, many new volunteers commenced work with incomplete records being maintained of their skillset, and background information. When this was recognised, the Salvation Army volunteer process was used to improve records. This would have been desirable from the outset.
- **Intelligence on Resourcing.** Full accounts should be produced in the spirit of transparency and good faith, and to appraise whether this represents best value.

What needs to happen now?

- **Mixed Mode Futures.** Statutory bodies and Third Sector partners should now be better equipped to respond to public health crises. However, at current levels of local government funding, citizens will not be able to receive all the support required from statutory bodies alone. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the need to appraise afresh ways in which local government could work with Third Sector partners to attend to local needs.

- **Tackling Root Cause in Inverclyde.** The work of ICARG has highlighted the scale of the often-hidden challenges that present in Inverclyde. A sharper focus is required on the underlying issues that led to the COVID-19 crisis being particularly challenging in Inverclyde.
- **Continuing to Meet Need Beyond COVID?** Many of the services offered by ICARG would be of value to citizens beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Consideration might be given as to whether ICARG – or one of its partners – should assume responsibility to continue with this work.
- **Exit Strategy.** Of more immediate concern is that the work may have encouraged a dependency/reliance on services which cannot be maintained with existing resource. ICARG should consider how to support users in the transition away from provision by ICARG’s partners.
- **Nurturing Local Leaders.** ICARG demonstrated the importance of local leaders. There is a local talent pool that could be nurtured and utilised more effectively, to promote the common good.
- **Examination of the ICARG Model.** The ‘ICARG’ model of working should be clearly specified (reflecting on the drivers of ‘worked well’, in order to distinguish it from alternatives, to identify its strengths/weaknesses, and to explore whether this should be replicated by others.
- **Reflective Learning.** Although this report has shared some reflections on ICARG, there is scope to extend this activity. From the solid ground of ‘good work was done’, comes the security that such reflection does not constitute a threat or a challenge. We encourage an openness and transparency among ICARG partners when reflecting on their experiences.

Appendix: Our Approach to the Evaluation

Introduction

This Appendix describes the approach taken by the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) when undertaking this independent appraisal of the work of the Inverclyde Community Action Response Group (ICARG).

Timeline

SPIRU was invited to undertake this evaluation on July 1st 2020, starting this work on July 6th, presenting a draft report on July 22nd, with the final report delivered in August.

Staffing

Professor McKendrick managed the evaluation, supervising the fieldwork that was undertaken by Jed Graham, a postgraduate research student within the Unit.

Our Work

The evaluation is based on an analysis of ICARG documentation, eight telephone interviews with leading figures within organisations that are part of the ICARG collective, and responses to ad-hoc queries that we raised.

ICARG provided SPIRU with the ICARG Services Information Pack⁶⁸ and access to the Facebook and Twitter accounts. The document was mined for relevant information.

SPIRU was presented with a list of the lead contacts of each organisation within the ICARG collective. Contact was made and each lead was asked to indicate their availability for interview week starting July 6th. The first interview was conducted on July 6th and the final interview was conducted on the 21st of

July.

These semi-structured interviews were focused⁶⁹ and short in length, ranging from 16 minutes to 60 minutes, which ensured that research objectives were fulfilled, without being overly demanding on the partners, who often had busy and demanding schedules.

Semi-structured interviews allow for a purposeful, systematic, and comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences of the project, while keeping the interview focused on the desired objective.⁷⁰

A topic guide was prepared, which explored the following issues:

- Background of interviewee
- Connections with Inverclyde area
- How they became involved with ICARG
- Their work with ICARG
- Thoughts on partnership working within ICARG
- Thoughts on impact of ICARG on people of Inverclyde
- Working with organisations that are not part of ICARG
- Future role of ICARG, in times of crisis
- Future role of ICARG, outside times of crisis

Interviewees were also afforded the opportunity to add any additional comment on issues of importance that were not covered.

Interviewees consented for the interviews to be audio-recorded, and these were then transcribed, coded, and analysed by the research team. Thematic analysis was utilised during the data analysis process.⁷¹ This data driven, bottom-up process of analysis involves six phases: data familiarisation; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining themes; and writing-up findings. Both Jed Graham (initially) and Professor McKendrick, reviewed the

transcripts.

The findings from the secondary data sources and interviews were analysed separately, and then considered as a whole. An inductive approach to analysis was adopted - generating key findings and themes from the data, rather than pre-determining through expectation and examining whether these are accurate.

Data were stored securely, with the intention that recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed within twelve months of publication of the final report. In this report, all contributions have been anonymised.

Further to the original interviews, Laura Reilly was contacted on Tuesday, July 21st for contact information of specific individuals not yet interviewed. Stephen Henry was contacted via email on July 18th, after his initial interview, for clarification on funding amounts and ICARG output.

Charlene Elliot (CVS Inverclyde) and Louise McVey (Inverclyde Council) were interviewed on Tuesday, July 21st. These are the only interviews included that were not conducted with members of ICARG. However, these interviews were considered to be useful - Charlene Elliot was present for many of the group meetings and had a hand in the group's early formation. Louise McVey worked closely with the group and was in constant communication with many members of the ICARG partnership throughout the crisis.

Our Principles

SPIRU is consistent with best practice in social research, and adheres to ethical and research guidelines developed by our institution and our professional bodies. The conclusions reached in this report are independent.

Endnotes

- ¹ For more information about the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, please visit: <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/research/spiru/>.
- ² For more information about the work of the Inverclyde Community Action Response Group, visit its Facebook pages at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/509429306657049/>
- ³ McKendrick, J.H. and Campbell, S. (2020) *Local action in Scotland to tackle food insecurity during the coronavirus crisis. A report for the Poverty and Inequality Commission*. Glasgow: SPIRU. <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-insecurity-SPIRU-final-report-June.pdf>
- ⁴ At the time of writing (July 2020), this work is nearing completion. For more information about this evaluation, contact Belville Community Gardens Trust: <http://belvillecommunitygarden.org.uk/contact-us/>
- ⁵ At the time of writing (July 2020), Jenna Woods, a Postgraduate Masters degree student in MSc Social Innovation, is currently undertaking research on ‘food citizenship for a sustainable food system in Inverclyde’. This work is due to be completed in August 2020. For more information, contact Professor McKendrick at jmke@gcu.ac.uk.
- ⁶ Covering an area of 160km², it is fourth smallest local authority in Scotland by size: National Records of Scotland (2020) *Mid-2019 Population Estimates*, Table 9.
- ⁷ The population was estimated at 77,800 on June 30th 2019: National Records of Scotland (2020) *Mid-2019 Population Estimates*, Table 2.
- ⁸ For more information, visit: <http://www.glasgowcityregion.co.uk/#home>
- ⁹ Audit Scotland (2020) *Local Government in Scotland. Overview 2020*. This is drawn from the data tableau that accompanies this report. Visit: <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/local-government-in-scotland-overview-2020>
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- ¹¹ National Records of Scotland (2020) *Inverclyde Council Area Profile*. [online]. Accessed at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/inverclyde-council-profile.html#table_pop_est
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- ¹⁵ Scottish government, *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, Data to Download, 2020*. This can be accessed at, <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/#datatodownload>

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