

# Evaluation of Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Services @ Glasgow Libraries

Final Report for Macmillan Cancer Support  
and Glasgow Life



*Social Research*

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*Service Design & Innovation*

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*Strategy & Collaboration*

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*Evaluation Support*

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*Social Impact Measurement*

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This report has been prepared by Social Value Lab on behalf of Macmillan Cancer Support and Glasgow Life.

The report presents the findings from the evaluation of Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Services @ Glasgow Libraries. This final report explores the progress, impact and learning from Phase One of the programme. It is the third of three main reports prepared as part of the study.

The evaluation team acknowledge the important role and contribution of the Evaluation Steering Group in guiding the scope and detail of this report.

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## Introduction

Macmillan Cancer Support and Glasgow Life are now working in partnership to establish Cancer Information and Support Drop-in Services in Glasgow's libraries. This is the largest programme of its kind being funded by Macmillan currently and is seen as a pilot for the UK as a whole.

This evaluation has been commissioned to consider the progress, effectiveness and impact of the three year set-up phase of the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Services (MCISS) @ Glasgow Libraries programme (up to the end of 2014). This includes the planning and implementation processes followed to establish the programme, whether the programme objectives were achieved (including undertaking the cultural and organisational change), the effectiveness of the volunteer programme, the service quality, the outcomes achieved by volunteers and service users - particularly relating to quality of life - and the effectiveness of the partnership.

This final report draws on evidence relating to programme partnership, process, and early outcomes. The research has been based on an analysis of Glasgow Life monitoring data and a comprehensive programme of fieldwork including interviews, focus groups and surveys involving: strategic partners and stakeholders; operational staff from Glasgow Life (including managers, the programme team and frontline library staff) and associated agencies; volunteers that deliver the service; and a selection of people that have used or been exposed to the service (to understand user experience and outcomes).

## The Programme

MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries was conceived as a six-year programme to be implemented over two phases - programme set-up (2012-15) and embedding (2015-18). At the time of writing it has been just over two years

since the first MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries drop-in service opened in June 2012.

Glasgow Life hosts the MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries programme. Glasgow Life was established in 2007 to deliver cultural and leisure services (including the Glasgow Libraries service) on behalf of, but not exclusively for, Glasgow City Council.

MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries was established as a strategically important and timely initiative for Glasgow Life and Macmillan. Partners agreed a broad and ambitious vision that would see cancer information and support made available through every library in Glasgow.

A broad and inclusive coalition of stakeholders was formed to help implement the programme. Partner contributions have been channelled through a programme Steering Group, Sub Groups, a Partnership Forum, and local Operational Steering Groups. The architecture of the partnership ensured the voice of volunteers was represented throughout.

Implementation of the programme is being co-ordinated and supported by a core team of staff that are firmly embedded in Glasgow Life.

MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries is based on a three-tiered model of information and support, with information points radiating from a network of hub services and volunteer-led drop-in services. In practice the main distinction is between those venues that offer a drop-in service and those that do not.

Macmillan has initiated a major programme of investment in the physical fabric of libraries to create a series of high quality, customised service spaces. The transformation of spaces and opening of services have been managed effectively although the process has taken longer than expected. In particular, there have been significant delays in concluding contractual negotiations that will see purpose-built service centres in four libraries. Overall, the

experience of rolling out service points highlighted the importance of a realistic and adequate timeframe over which to plan, build consensus and implement a reasonably complex development programme.

There are now (at July 2014) 17 venues across the city that provide volunteer-led MCISS drop-in services (providing 72 hours of service per week) and information points in most other libraries. The final six MCISS services will be opened by the end of October 2014.

Coinciding with the roll out of the service has been the development of a number of complementary cancer support initiatives involving Macmillan in Glasgow. It is anticipated that these initiatives will over time prove mutually reinforcing and serve to strengthen the visibility and take-up of Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries services.

Considerable efforts have been made to encourage awareness of the MCISS services. Given the pressure to get services established, however, the promotional push has been spread thinly across the city and services are still overly reliant on interest from passers-by and word of mouth locally. The development of stronger flow of referrals from local health professionals and others is regarded as essential for long-term success.

The continual opening and promotion of MCISS drop-in services in libraries has resulted in slowly rising attendance (there have been approximately 3,140 visits to services in just over two years). It has taken much longer than expected to get people using the services and the level of attendance at drop-ins will fall far short of the aspirational target set (800 visits annually to each service). The target does not appear to have been based on a realistic assessment of potential demand for the service. It is a matter of supposition at this stage whether greater patience and promotion will significantly increase footfall at the drop-in services or whether unmet

need and public appetite for the service have simply been overestimated.

## Partners and Stakeholders

Macmillan Cancer Support and Glasgow Life came together and subsequently built a broad partnership-based programme. The partnership benefits from a long-term and shared vision and enjoys strong strategic alignment and support from stakeholder organisations.

Partnership arrangements to guide and support the programme are highly effective. While the partnership structures have changed somewhat over time, along with stakeholder roles and contributions, these arrangements have generally enabled partnership working to deepen and flourish. There is broad recognition that arrangements will need to evolve as the programme matures and while views are not yet fully formed, the views expressed would suggest the need for a closer integration of partnership arrangements within the management structure of Glasgow Life.

There is strong satisfaction with the architecture of the partnership at all levels. The core partnership between Glasgow Life and Macmillan in particular appears strong, is based on trust and mutual respect, and seems set to endure. Any challenges across the partnership generally appear to have been relatively minor and symptomatic of the differing organisational cultures and competing pressures that most partnerships face.

Strategic and operational stakeholders have generally characterised the programme as highly beneficial. For both Glasgow Life and Macmillan the partnership has enhanced visibility, relationships, reputation, and reach. More generally, the benefits of partnership are playing out at community level where local stakeholders are usefully coming together to exchange information, learn from each other, improve practice,

and strengthen referral pathways for people affected by cancer.

Generally stakeholders feel a strong sense of ownership of the programme and are able to influence its direction, although this influence is most visibly exercised through the programme Steering Group. The MCISS programme staff in particular are highly regarded both in terms of facilitating stakeholder contributions and in delivering the programme effectively.

There is widespread and growing confidence among stakeholders in the success of the programme. The foundations of the programme are considered strong and progress positive. However, equally, there is acknowledgement that the rationale for scaling out the Easterhouse model was somewhat flawed and that it is too early to reach firm conclusions about its success and that the programme has a long way to go to fully realise aspirations for the programme.

## Volunteers

The programme has proven effective at reaching out to volunteers, including those from equalities groups. It has recruited and trained an estimated 187 volunteers and is broadly in line to deliver on targets in this respect, although there has been a significant turnover of volunteers with one-in-three no longer active.

A deep and committed pool of volunteers is now in place. These volunteers are more likely to be female and younger in age than the Glasgow population as a whole, although in other main respects the pool reflects the diversity of the city. A particularly important, if transient, role has been played by students.

A tried and tested menu of core and optional training opportunities has been created. This training activity is generally well regarded by volunteers although does not always prepare them fully for the challenging volunteering tasks they subsequently take on. Confidence can be an

initial issue for volunteers although this seems to be overcome with the training, informal peer support, and experience in the position.

Volunteers have been given a variety of opportunities to learn and develop and are getting a lot out of the role. Almost two-thirds of volunteers (63%) report having developed as a result of the volunteering experience. Work is now underway to build on the confidence and experience of volunteers by creating a 'lead volunteer' role.

For the most part volunteers are enjoying the experience and contributing well (collectively providing 640 hours a month in the most recent period). They feel valued and well supported by Information and Support Officers. They have also quickly become central to delivering services and a welcomed and established part of the team in libraries. However, the slow take-up of services has emerged as an important source of frustration, meaning that volunteers are not always interacting with as many service users or contributing as much as they would like. Tasks and expectations have had to be managed carefully by the programme team to address volunteer frustration and aid retention.

The retention of volunteers is an issue of concern and one that merits further attention. The most common, and understandable, reason for stopping volunteering is due to changing circumstances or other personal or professional commitments, which result in difficulties giving time to volunteering. However, in almost one-in-three cases things either 'didn't work out' or individuals moved on to other volunteering opportunities. A part of the underlying reason seems to be the lack of meaningful role for volunteers given the low service take-up although further investigation of the experience of leavers is required to fully understand this issue.

## Libraries and Library Staff

From the outset, the MCISS programme team has engaged extensively and well with Glasgow Libraries in the planning and establishment of services. This has occurred against a backdrop of considerable cultural and organisational change within Glasgow Life, which in turn has made the job of establishing services somewhat more complex.

Initial training in volunteer management was provided and valued by library staff and this type of training is now set to be more widely cascaded across Glasgow Life services. Despite library staff generally feeling well prepared to host the MCISS services there have been widespread calls for staff to be kept more fully informed about the services and how they can most usefully contribute.

Library staff have played a growing role in relation to MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries. This takes the form of assistance in promoting the service, referring customers to it, and dealing with associated enquiries. There is still scope for wider and fuller involvement of library staff.

At this stage the views of library staff are generally very positive about the day-to-day operation of the local MCISS services. Around 92% of Glasgow Libraries staff indicated that it was 'very' or 'somewhat' effective in providing a service within the library. This broad satisfaction extends across the key aspects of the service including the volunteer contribution, information resources, and branded spaces. Some dissatisfaction with the service remains, however, and tangible concerns have been noted relating to the apparent low take-up of services and perceived inadequacy of promotion.

The introduction of the partially-defined Macmillan spaces within the host libraries have broadly been welcomed by staff. This has provided a welcoming space that appears well used outside of scheduled

Macmillan drop-in services (for comfortable seating, outreach services, group activities, and other things).

The MCISS programme seems to align well with the changes taking hold in libraries and is helping to recast these as venues offering a wider set of information and community services. The introduction of MCISS services is also reported by library managers and staff to have impacted particularly positively on the way that space is used in libraries, the role now played by libraries locally, and relationships now being formed with volunteers.

According to library staff the Macmillan initiative is promoting a positive role for libraries as important sources of health information. This builds on the already established and growing health benefits of Glasgow's libraries. The introduction of the service also appears to be changing the dynamics between libraries and their customers (improving the quality of service and fostering more positive relationships with them). However, given the modest reach of MCISS services to date, there is as yet no evidence that the programme is significantly impacting on the take-up of other library services or significantly boosting the footfall in libraries.

## Service Users

MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries is delivering a small but growing number of helpful contacts at drop-in services to people affected by cancer. The service has recorded around 3,140 such contacts with service users in just over two years. As already noted, this level of contact with the service falls far short of the initial (possibly unrealistic) aspirations.

Most contacts with the service last for less than an hour and are primarily one-off. Yet, there is evidence of a regular pattern of attendance in around one-in-five cases, which may indicate a need for ongoing support or perhaps the need for a support group.

Most of the service contacts have been with women (signalling a need for further targeted work to engage with men) and older people which one might expect given the demographic of people living with cancer. The service appears inclusive and to be reaching out well to equalities groups. It is supporting a mix of people directly affected by cancer (most typically living with the condition or undergoing treatment) and their loved ones (often having experienced bereavement).

By some margin, the main reason for approaching the service is for emotional support (with no gender variation evident); simply talking through issues with someone that can understand, won't judge, and will offer gentle direction. The combination of talking and onward referrals accounts for almost three-quarters of all interventions by volunteers.

The act of providing information is integral to such support, but usually in a supporting capacity rather than as an end in itself. The information content, usually provided through leaflets and associated materials, tends to focus on helping to understand the detailed aspects of cancers and to support living with and after cancer. The information appears to be appropriately personalised to service users' requirements and stage in their cancer journey, with no obvious gaps in formation identified by volunteers. The vast majority of information is distributed through libraries that also host MCISS drop-in services, with only around 10% of content being accessed in stand-alone information points in libraries.

The setting in which the drop-in services are provided is an important consideration. The fact that information and support is provided in a local venue is highly valued by service users. Beyond this, on balance the conclusion is that while open public spaces in libraries can cause some hesitance when first engaging with cancer information services, it does not provide a significant barrier to ongoing interaction. Generally, the convenience and welcoming nature of the Macmillan spaces in local libraries is an

important asset, although an appropriate balance between visibility of the space and privacy must be struck for each venue (in practice this means identifying a quiet space, not necessarily a dedicated meeting room, where sensitive or difficult conversations with service users can be held).

Generally service users consider the service to be of a high quality and report positive experiences of it. The knowledge of volunteers, their reassuring presence, and their active and compassionate listening is central to the experience.

The evidence suggests that the service is helping users to move forward and realise importantly held goals (e.g. re-establishing an active lifestyle following cancer diagnosis, finding a way through a difficult situation, dealing with stress and distress, and holding down work and managing a daily routine).

## Programme Sustainability and Replication

There remains a steadfast commitment to a continuing and inherently sustainable volunteer-led service. However, views are less well formed at this stage on what changes, if any, might be required to the current programme to achieve this.

According to senior representatives from Glasgow Life the costs of a continuing service have been built into future service plans and budgets. This is in line with the agreement with Macmillan and provides confidence in the financial viability of the service.

There remains a strong expectation and belief that the programme can and should have a long-term future. Stakeholders and staff have great confidence in the long-term prospects of the service but are aware of factors within and outside of the programme that might influence its sustainability.

The phased 'handover' of responsibility from the dedicated programme team has been identified as critical to the sustainability of MCISS services. Some transitional steps are being taken and appear to be progressing well although a detailed succession plan for the service has not been formally agreed or widely shared.

There was widespread support for the idea of replicating the model to support people with other long-term conditions. The strategies identified included opening up the Macmillan spaces in libraries for use by other services that support people with other conditions and extending the remit and knowledge of volunteers to support this wider range of conditions. There was some consensus that the fundamentals of the service must first be sound, and services well established, although less clarity on when and how the service might be extended.

There was also a broad belief that the MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries approach could be replicated elsewhere. Stakeholders have urged careful consideration of the conditions necessary for replication and identified a combination of factors evident in Glasgow that have been important influences on success locally. These have included factors unique to Glasgow (the characteristics of the city, its agencies, its libraries, and its population) as well as more transferable elements (e.g. the quality volunteering programme, the design of the customised cancer support environments in libraries).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries is a substantial and complex initiative that represents a step-change for Macmillan and a different way of doing business for Glasgow Life.

The evidence contained in this report broadly indicates that the set-up phase of the programme has been delivered to good effect, is beginning to build momentum in

service delivery, and is demonstrating some promising results.

The service points established in the host venues are now bedding in well. Glasgow Libraries staff have been welcoming and supportive of the new services and are being increasingly involved in the day-to-day work of the services. On the whole, the new Macmillan spaces in libraries are functioning well, relationships with volunteers developing, and small but positive changes are occurring in the way that libraries work and are perceived internally. Nonetheless, it is too early to make a judgement about the overall impact of the initiative on libraries.

Overall, the use of the MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries services is less at this stage than was anticipated. Considerable efforts have been made to raise awareness locally, although it has taken much longer than expected to get people using the services. The target level of attendance at drop-in services will therefore not be achieved during Phase 1 of the programme, with even the most established services only likely to average 275 visits per year compared to the original (somewhat unrealistic or overambitious) target of 800 visits per venue annually. This brings into question the robustness of the evidence on which the success of the Easterhouse pilot service was judged and the readiness of the model to be scaled-out without further detailed assessment of unmet need and public appetite for the service. Nonetheless, with attendance on an upward trajectory it is possible that services of this scale and ambition require longer than two years to become embedded. At this stage it is difficult to predict with certainty what level of use the services will achieve as users largely find their way to them through passing by, word of mouth, and signposting by a member of library staff.

Despite these concerns, the evidence indicates that people using the service are highly satisfied and derive great value from it. By some margin, the main reason for approaching the service is for emotional



support, with the combination of talking and onward referrals accounting for almost three-quarters of all interventions by volunteers. The act of providing information is integral to such support, but usually in a supporting capacity rather than as an end in itself. Service users regard this as meeting a real need, are broadly satisfied with its mode of delivery, and seem to be deriving real and tangible benefits in a number of cases.

Volunteers have been instrumental to the delivery and effectiveness of the service. Excellent recruitment, training and support arrangements have been created and a large and committed pool of volunteers is now in place. These volunteers are typically enjoying the experience, feel well supported, and are contributing effectively. However, the experience of taking on a cancer information support role can prove daunting, frustrations can arise where volunteers feel they are not contributing fully, and the retention of volunteers is an issue of concern.

Among the other critical success factors of the MCISS @ Glasgow Libraries model identified are: the commitment and leadership exhibited from the two core partners; having a delivery partner (Glasgow Life) with the scale, management capacity, and flexibility to deliver a programme of this reach and complexity; putting in place a broad and enabling partnership structure; having a solid library network in place that was well prepared and positioned to host cancer information and support services; creating welcoming service environments in libraries that strike an appropriate balance between visibility and privacy; and providing the necessary and long-term investment required to deliver a high quality programme.

Commitments and plans are in place which will ensure that it becomes an affordable and routine part of the business of Glasgow Life. Subject to an effective transitional period during which the work of the programme will be mainstreamed, there is confidence that the results of the

programme will grow and multiply. Based on the experience so far, there is also interest in exploring how the service can be extended to support people with other long-term conditions in Glasgow or replicated (with careful adaptation) to other settings throughout the UK. At this stage, however, there is not yet a clear route map to guide the transition of the service in Glasgow onto a sustainable long-term footing or to extend its reach.

While most of the basic building blocks of an effective service are in place there remain some outstanding concerns, most notably in the level of demand for and take-up of services.

In order to strengthen delivery and mainstreaming of the programme over the next three years the evaluation has recommended:

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- Devoting additional resources to communications and marketing in order to build awareness and demand for services.
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- Further engaging with health professionals to strengthen the base of referrals to the services.
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- Providing flexibility in the role and level of provision at each library in light of experience.
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- Taking targeted action to strengthen local community engagement and involvement in the service, particularly within areas of multiple deprivation.
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- Refining training and support measures to ensure that volunteers are fully equipped to deliver services and that volunteer retention is maximised.
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- Setting in motion an explicit and phased handover of functions currently carried out by the central MCISS programme team.
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- Making gradual changes to the partnership structures as part of the

mainstreaming of the service within Glasgow Life.

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- At an agreed point, taking small and measured steps to extend services to people affected by other long-term conditions.
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Find out more  
[www.socialvaluelab.org.uk](http://www.socialvaluelab.org.uk)

[info@socialvaluelab.org.uk](mailto:info@socialvaluelab.org.uk)

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Call us on **0141 530 1479**

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Studio 222, South Block,  
60 Osborne Street, Glasgow, G1 5QH.

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