

healthwatch
Liverpool

Sensory Impairment Engagement Project

March 2023



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1. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of an engagement project carried out by Healthwatch Liverpool at the request of Liverpool City Council (LCC), on Sensory Impairment Services in Liverpool.

LCC commissioners were interested to know the views of the users of Sensory Impairment Services on the method of delivery of services, their accessibility, how to improve services, and what difference these services make to service users' lives.

In September 2022, Healthwatch Liverpool engaged with two organisations who support people with sensory impairments. These organisations were Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP), who provide services for d/Deaf and hard of hearing people, and Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub, who provide services for blind and deafblind people.

The deadline to complete the engagement was originally set for the end of November 2022, however due to the circumstances of ensuring the project was accessible to blind people it was extended for Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub to January 2023.

The engagement proved successful and was a meaningful exercise in laying the foundations required for on-going discussions with the community. Based on the analysis of the available evidence, Healthwatch Liverpool compiled this report and a series of informed recommendations which will be presented to Liverpool City Council, who commission Sensory Impairment Services.

There are many positive examples throughout the report of where service users indicate the services are working well in regard to accessibility. However, there were also many examples where feedback indicated that improvements could be useful.

2. About the organisations

About MSDP

MSDP has been contracted by Liverpool City Council to deliver services and support to d/Deaf, deafblind, and Hard of Hearing People aged 18 years and over. The main services they are commissioned to deliver by the local authority are 'duty sessions' which deal with a wide range of issues in relation to housing related support, access/signposting to other services, managing finances and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits, and support with health services. Additionally, MSDP provides aids and equipment assessments, installation, and repairs or deal with enquiries. MSDP also provides social activities, interpreters and other support services.

As well as providing support and services MSDP also services as a community hub for many d/Deaf people. Some of the MSDP activities offered throughout 2022 included British Sign Language (BSL), walking groups for all, sports tasters for d/Deaf women such as netball and golf, knit and natter groups, and BSL Warm Hubs to support d/Deaf people through the winter months.

MSDP have come across challenges in recent years, mainly the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic with more than a third of their staff team off with Covid over the Christmas period and into the New Year. Staff recruitment has also been a challenge, in line with the rest of the Health and Social Care and Charity sector.

MSDP services have also been extended to Wirral Society for Deaf and Partially Sighted People in Birkenhead and the charity is now an Executive Director of Wirral Health and Wellbeing CIC.

About Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Learning Hub

Bradbury Fields is Liverpool and Knowsley's main provider of services for blind and partially sighted people. They offer a comprehensive range of services including rehabilitation, information and advocacy, eye clinic liaison, low vision, employment support, transcription, visual impairment awareness training, health and wellbeing, and have a resource centre.

There are several other activities which take place remotely in chat rooms. At the Bradbury Centre, the Sight Loss Learning Hub offers services which have been reintroduced or altered to become face to face, since Covid 19 restrictions were lifted, which include the choir, quizzes, 'Let's talk' (an emotional support group facilitated by a qualified counsellor) and others.

In October 2021, Bradbury Fields and the Catholic Blind Institute merged, with Bradbury Fields becoming a division of the Institute. The Catholic Blind Institute previously ran the Sight Loss Learning Hub at the Christopher Grange building. The Sight Loss Learning Hub previously offered training courses to people with sight loss to help maintain their independence and live safely in their own homes. The centre was also an important site for people with visual impairments to meet others and make and maintain social connections. Changes to funding and contractual arrangements have led to changes in the services offered at

the Sight Loss Learning Hub over the years. Bradbury Fields has taken over a lot of the training and rehabilitation work previously offered at the Sight Loss Learning Hub.

3. Methodology

A variety of methods were used such as focus groups, smart surveys, and one-to-one interviews to gather service users' feedback. Healthwatch Liverpool, with the help of Liverpool City Council and Bradbury Fields, produced an audio letter invitation and enlarged letters to ensure that all those who use Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub were informed about how to participate. A Smart survey was produced with British Sign Language (BSL) clips explaining the questions, and MSDP were consulted about how to frame the questions to make them more user friendly for d/Deaf and hard of hearing people. A Smart Survey was designed for blind and deafblind people which they could use on their PC or phone, with apps to help them access it. Healthwatch Liverpool produced two Smart Surveys for MSDP Service users and service users at Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub. We also interviewed members of staff and managers in those two organisations about challenges which they face day-to-day regarding service delivery and the additional challenges they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Two 1-2-1 in-person interviews and two phone interviews were carried out to obtain in-depth feedback. Several targeted focus groups or workshops were held to discuss barriers and good practice experienced by service users of both MSDP and Bradbury Fields/ Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub.

An evening focus group was carried out for MSDP's service users on 8th November 2022, where a mixture of services users and staff attended. Two focus groups were planned for Bradbury Fields/ Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub service users on 9th and 11th January 2023. However due to low attendance for the second focus group, only one evening meeting was carried out by telephone to save the person travelling into the city centre.

Two 1-2-1 interviews were carried out in the Liverpool Healthwatch office for Bradbury Fields/ Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub service users who did not wish to participate in focus groups.

4. Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP) engagement

Focus group findings

We ran a focus group in November 2022 which was advertised on the MSDP website and promoted by their staff. It was an evening meeting which six people attended. Two of them were working at MSDP as well as being service users.

The main purpose of the focus group was to ask how they felt about service delivery, how the services were affected during the Covid lockdown and how to improve the services.

People we spoke to had used the duty service (surgery and face-to-face), community activity, volunteering, equipment and liaising and signposting services.

What people value about MSDP services

All those we talked to felt that services that MSDP delivered were vital for d/Deaf and hard of hearing people. They thought that the centre was accessible, and it was a great place to get help and support but also to meet other service users. The community activities were praised by all who we met. They were all pleased about how there were activities on a daily basis and how inclusive it was.

The importance of the services delivered by MSDP was mentioned by everyone we talked to. Some of the participants had been service users for decades and still felt that they could not cope without the services. They all agreed that MSDP was an essential part of their mental health and well-being.

"I would be lost without it".

"It feels so much better to be a part of the community."

"There is always something going on every day, it is good for mental health."

They also mentioned the importance of the equipment which MSDP provides for them and also repairs. They stressed that it gave them more independence and empowers them to do things without asking for help.

Finally, they mentioned the work of the duty sessions which were vital for them to link with services such as health and social care. It helped them to have their problems solved. The service helped them to book appointment and interpreters.

Impact of Covid

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was enormous for service users as there were no activities and they felt more isolated. All home visits and face-to-face meetings with service users except the emergency ones were stopped and it had a negative impact on service users and staff. As government announcements had no BSL interpreters, they felt that information about Covid was not delivered to them properly. They also lost 5 service users to Covid which again had an impact on staff and services users' mental health.

"In my work role at MSDP, I ran a support group throughout Covid, including visiting very vulnerable clients. Luckily some people had access to video technology. Older people without access to technology or supportive friends and family were very isolated during the times we weren't allowed to do visits and the deterioration in these very vulnerable and isolated people was really severe."

"Our support [from MSDP] was vital. Covid was awful for us – some services stopped, like teaching and face-to-face appointments stopped, and the building was closed. Only emergency equipment visits went ahead."

What could be improved?

Although the level of satisfaction with MSDP's service delivery was high, there was an acknowledgment that certain services could be improved. They felt that more funding was needed, particularly social care.

Some of staff and one service user from Knowsley raised concerns that MSDP were not commissioned to support service users from Knowsley. Although they could use the activities, there were no duty sessions available for them. The need for more awareness sessions about d/Deaf and hard of hearing people's needs and experiences for health professionals and social workers was also suggested to improve MSDP service delivery.

Some also mentioned that MSDP should promote their services and the organisation's achievements to those who do not use the services.

Some of staff and one service user from Knowsley raised concerns that MSDP were not commissioned to support service users from Knowsley. Although they could use the activities, there were no duty sessions available for them.

MSDP Focus Group Findings

When did you first start using Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP) services?

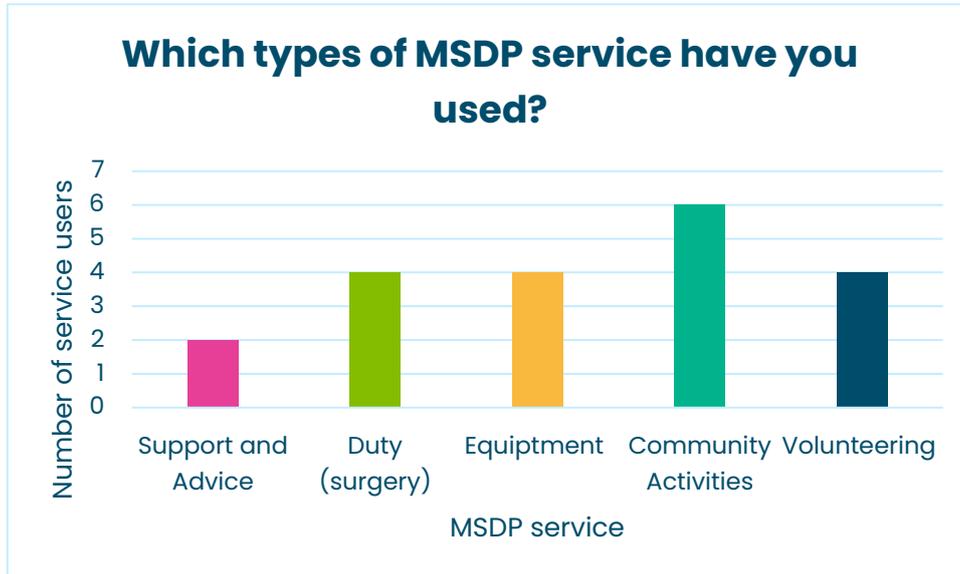
1 person had been using the services from 1 to 5 years. 6 had been using the services from 6 to 10 years. 2 people had been using the services for over 20 years. 1 had been using the services since 1986. Those accessing MSDP for 1-2 years were more likely to have moved to the area recently.

Refugees: there have been more refugees and asylum seekers accessing MSDP over the past few years.

How often do you use MSDP for support or duty?

Four people told us they used MSDP for support or duty every week. 1 person said they use the services every two weeks and 1 person said they never used these services, however that had used other services such as activities and volunteering.

Which of the MSDP services have you used? (Please tick all that apply)



All participants had taken part in community activities but all other services had also been used to a greater or lesser extent.

How would you rate MSDP services?

We asked service users who had used certain services at MSDP to rate them on a scale: 'Excellent, Very Good, Average, Poor, Very Poor'. Out of the people that had used services, this is what we found.

Duty sessions

2 people said they would rate the duty service as 'excellent' and 2 people said 'very good'

Equipment

1 person rates the equipment service 'excellent'

Community Activities

5 people told us that community activities were Excellent and 1 person said they were Very Good.

Liaising and Signposting

Liaising and signposting services were also rated Excellent by the 2 people who had used them.

Why did you rate it that way?

Service users elaborated on why they rated the services as they did. Some of the reasons given related to the service providing more than support, but community for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing population. Other reasons given included good accessibility and inclusivity, the practical life support, and the services impact on service users mental and physical wellbeing.

"Accessibility, the building is really accessible."

"I don't speak English – here I can meet people, face-to-face, to talk in my own language." [BSL]

"BSL available and letters get translated into other languages."

"Coming here improves my mental health."

"If there was no MSDP, I'd be lost. I wouldn't have a connection with people. The deaf club is needed for the Deaf community."

How did Covid –19 pandemic affect the services?

We asked about the impact of Covid-19 on service users in regard to the changes around MSDP service delivery. Service users told us that they felt more isolated due to a reduction in or cancellation of face-to-face activities and support as there were only emergency face-to-face sessions available. People also told us that this had an impact on their mental and physical health. There was a change towards remote activities which service users told us excluded those who could not take part digitally.

"The building was shut so no activities could run. Service users were more isolated and depressed and 5 service users died due to Covid."

"There was never a BSL interpreter for government announcements during Covid. If we had access to the community [by being able to come to MSDP], we could have shared that information between us. The Scottish and Welsh governments had interpreters, but the English government didn't. "

"Duty services carried on remotely or in a text-based form, but that doesn't suit everyone. Community activities ceased overnight – for people without friends and family, that was really, really awful. Some people couldn't understand why [we] weren't going out because translated information wasn't available."

Q7: What difference has MSDP made to your life?

"I would be lost without it"

"Equipment maintenance means more independence."

"Help to book interpreter for appointments."

"MSDP help us to connect to other services."

“The duty service helps people with hospitals – for example, hospital letters never say if an interpreter has been booked, need [MSDP] to call to ask. ”

“It’s so valuable having a 7-day service. There is something going on for the community every day here, everyone can access something at some point.”

“From an NHS perspective – MSDP raise concerns regarding access. Communication between MSDP and NHS services is taking place, which is positive.”

“Other services also rely on MSDP to make themselves more accessible to the deaf community. ”

“Issues with booking interpreters, there are cultural issues for deaf communities, for instance if the interpreter booked comes from another city, they may not know about certain events or background information about the city. Like interpreters who didn’t know the year Hillsborough happened and they kept translating it as 1996 Hillsborough”

Q8: How could you improve MSDP?

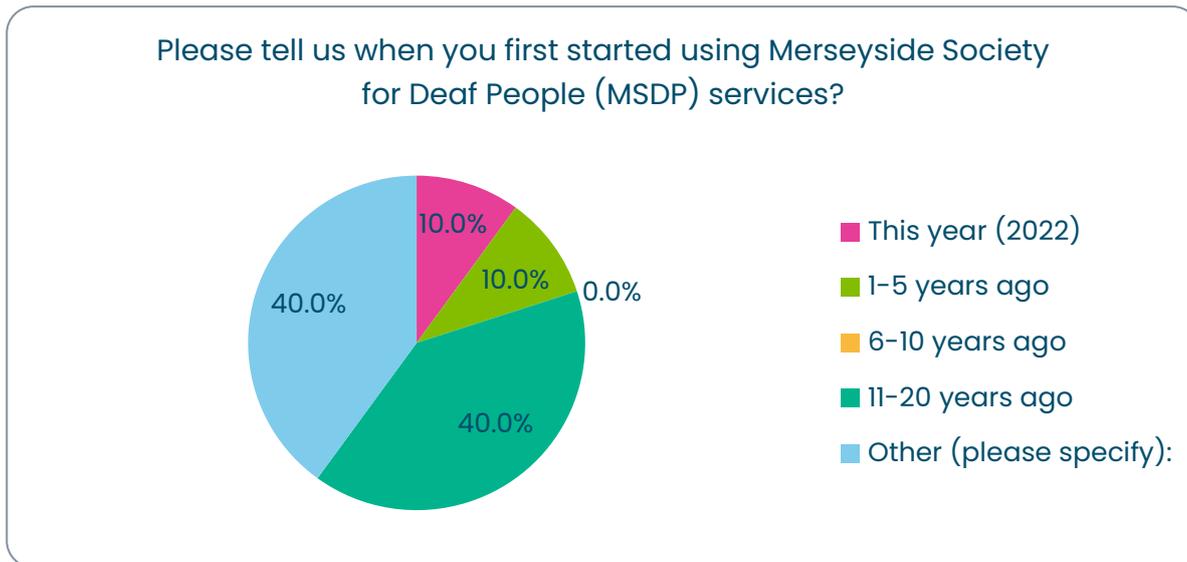
Recommendations from service users in focus group

- More funding for social work.
- One negative about MSDP – the service doesn’t cover all Merseyside areas. Non-Liverpool residents can’t access the duty or equipment service. These services are not funded in Knowsley. Would like to see MSDP services extended.
- There is a major requirement to train non-deaf social workers on deaf awareness and culture. It should be part of their overall training.
- It doesn’t matter where the social workers dealing with deaf and hard of hearing are based. They don’t need to be based at MSDP, the important thing is Deaf awareness training for them should be compulsory.
- More funding to cover Knowsley as well in our duty services, as Knowsley have no or very few services offered to them and although they come to MSDP they are unable to get all the benefits.
- There is a major requirement to train non-deaf social workers on deaf awareness and culture. It should be part of their overall training.
- It doesn’t matter where the social workers dealing with deaf and hard of hearing are based. They don’t need to be based at MSDP, the important thing is Deaf awareness training for them should be compulsory.
- Currently, MSDP can’t help people in Knowsley. The equipment and duty services in Knowsley for the deaf community are really poor – coming to MSDP, you can see how much better and quicker these services are in Liverpool.

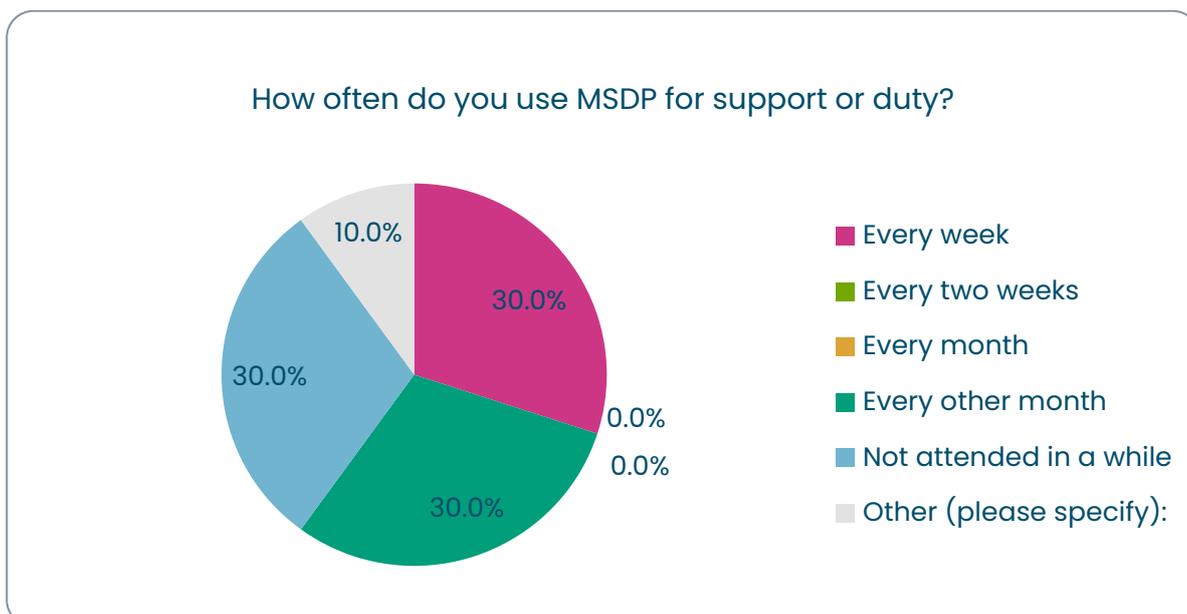
MDSP – Smart survey data

Part of our engagement included using a BSL adapted Smart survey accessible to d/Deaf and hard of hearing service users to collect their views on MSDP services. The demographics of those who completed the survey and those who took part in the focus group were very similar. There were also similarities in the outcome of the focus group and the smart survey results.

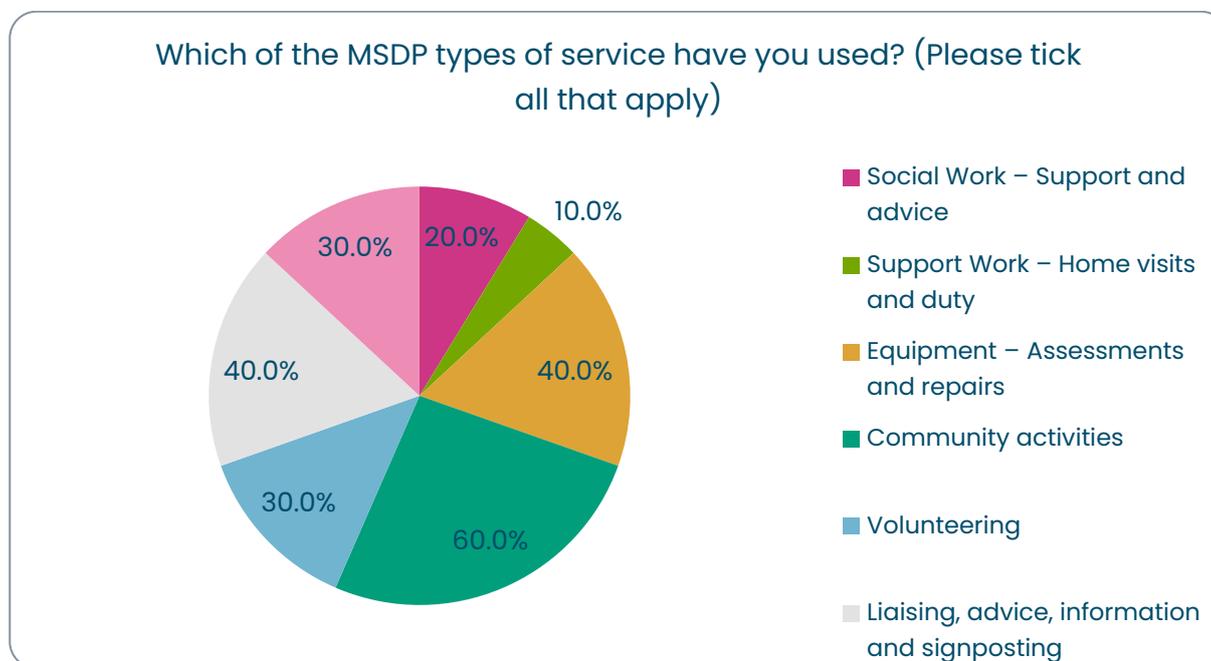
Q1: 10 people completed this question on the survey. 3 people had not used the services for a while and 4 had started using the services from 11 to 20 years ago, 4 people started using the service over 20 years ago, 1 person started this year and 1 started 1-5 years ago.



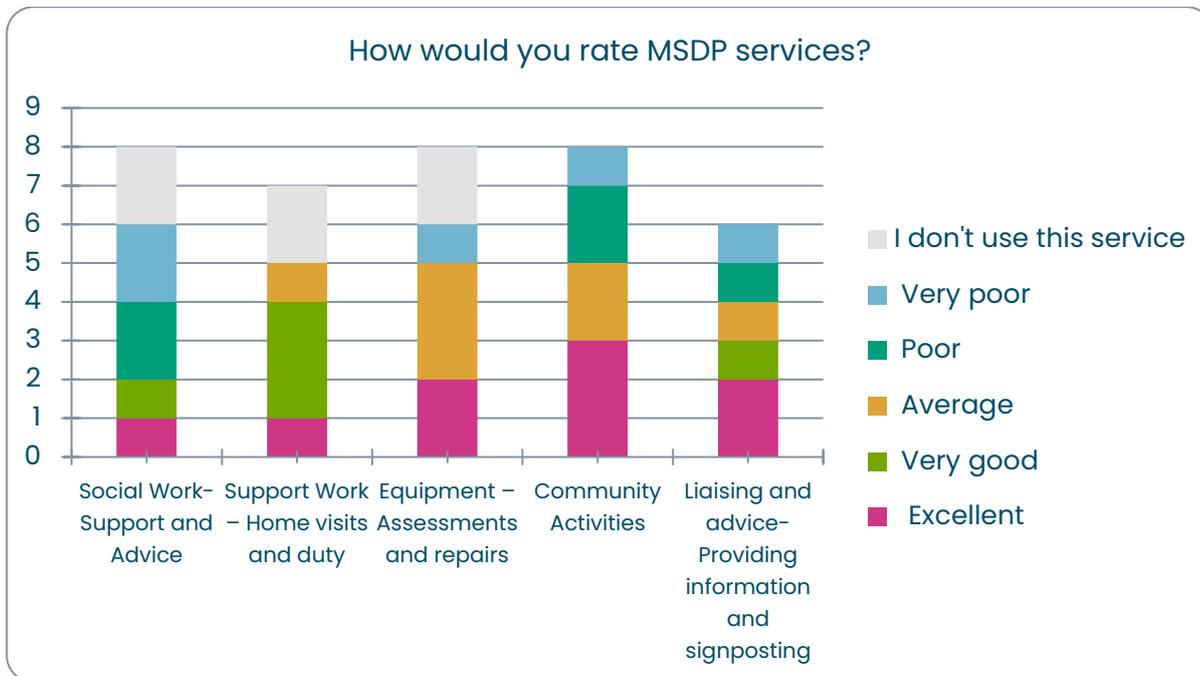
Q2: We asked people how often they used MSDP services or duty. 10 people answered this question. 3 of those who completed this question had not used the services for while. 3 People told us that they used MSDP services every week, 3 said every month and also 3 people said every other month. 1 person said they used the services every two weeks.



Q3: 10 people completed this question. 2 people mostly used 'social work-support and advice'. 1 people used 'support work- home visit and duty'. 4 used 'equipment' services, 6 used 'community activities', 4 people used 'liaison advice, information and signposting, and 3 used 'volunteering services. 3 people stated 'other' services such as level 1 and 2 BSL courses and social work placement. The service users who filled out the smart survey used the 'duty' services less than the service users in the focus group. Only 1 (10%) completed the survey used the 'duty' services compared with 3 (50%) people in the focus group.



Q4: The level of satisfaction with services was high but not as high as among those who attended the focus group. We noticed more people rated some of the services average or lower. For instance, 66% rated the social work, support, and advice as poor or very poor. 9 people overall answered this question. 1 person said, 'social work, support and advice' was excellent, 1 person said, 'very good', 2 said it was 'poor', 2 put 'very poor' and 2 didn't use the service. Community activities had the highest rating, 8 people answered the question, with 3 people stating this service was 'excellent', 2 said 'poor', and 2 people said 'very poor'



Q5: Most of the comments relating to how important MSDP was to their life were extremely positive. 8 people answered this question overall. 7 of them made positive comments relating to the importance of the service to their life. 1 person made a negative comment, stating that:

“MSDP used to be a community where EVERYONE felt safe and have a sense of belonging. This is long gone now. The staff only think what will benefit them and not what will benefit the Deaf community.”

In the next question where we asked how to improve services they suggested more investment from the Government, more staff and more deaf staff.

One suggested:

“Get rid of Local Authority funding, make Local Authority accountable to provide a fair and accessible service for Deaf community. MSDP should be there to community activities for all. MSDP need to do more to bring diversity and provide opportunities for people external.”

In our smart survey we did not ask any question with regards to the impact of Covid 19.

5. Bradbury Fields/ Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub engagement project

Bradbury Fields focus group findings

The focus group was held in January 2023, so that Bradbury Fields would have time to send out audio invitations to service users via CD.

Six people attended the focus group at The Bradbury Centre. We also heard feedback from four other people individually, either by speaking to them face-to-face or over the phone. People we spoke to had a varied experience of Bradbury Fields: some had been service users for decades, some for years, and some had only just attended the service for the first time. We were also able to speak to someone who was a family carer for a service user.

We asked people what services and support they accessed at Bradbury Fields. People we spoke to used a variety of services, social groups and support at Bradbury Fields including: counselling, rehabilitation (including cane training, and training with assistive technology), information and advocacy services, access to equipment, the swimming club, gym club, walking group, and other social groups and peer support. Some people we spoke to had attended classes at the Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub, before it merged with Bradbury Fields, including cookery classes, woodworking, and Braille.

Some people came to the centre on a regular basis, accessing support weekly or multiple times a week; others accessed support less often. Some people we spoke to who had been blind or visually impaired for a significant period told us they tended to access support services, such as rehab and advocacy, less often but still attended the center regularly for social activities. Even when people felt they did not need to access support, they felt reassured support was there should they need it and found the opportunity to socialise with other visually impaired and blind people valuable.

What people value about Bradbury Fields

We asked people how they felt about the quality of services at Bradbury Fields. We also asked them what difference using the service made to their lives.

Everyone that we spoke to said they felt Bradbury Fields was an important service for the blind and visually impaired community in Liverpool. Several people expressed that they felt the service had been key in helping them maintain independence and good mental and physical health. At least one

person we spoke to told us the support they had received had helped them with their sobriety.

"If it wasn't for Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange I'd be lost"

"Before I had a [guide] dog and came to Chris Grange, I couldn't cope. I found it hard to tell people. I'm here to give my feedback because I'm grateful. I wouldn't be in a good place now if I didn't have the support here." - Service User

'It's given me the drive to move forward and live. I can do a lot more than I thought. I start college tomorrow. [Staff have] been amazing and made me focus on what I can achieve.' - Service User

Participants who had attended classes from Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub in the past felt this was particularly valuable in helping them retain and maintain their independence.

People were grateful for advocacy and related support, including support with applying for Personal Independence Payments (PIP), and accessing social housing. People felt that staff at Bradbury Fields were really supportive and helped 'fight their corner' in accessing support they needed. Some people told us they were able to get in touch with Bradbury Fields staff to help resolve other problems in their daily lives, such as school vans blocking pavements near their home, which meant they were unable to walk up or down their street.

"A lot of [housing] stuff you have to fight for, but Bradbury Fields will help you talk to the right people. ... I feel really supported by Bradbury Fields, they help me make sense of the processes involved." - Service User

Most people we spoke to were also able to access sport and physical activity through the centre. People valued being able to do this. They told us about how difficult it was to access sport as a blind or visually impaired person.

"[The swimming] was excellent when I could go. I've struggled to access swimming as someone with visual impairment." - Service User

A number of people spoke about the support they received with equipment from Bradbury Fields. Equipment people had used included talking scales, talking microwaves, other kitchen equipment, and radios. People were also supported to learn to use adaptive programmes or apps to help them use their phones, and other electronics.

Another important aspect of the service for people was being able to receive support from those who understood sight loss and associated conditions. Several people told us that when they tried to access support outside of Bradbury Fields, they felt people they spoke to were not understanding of their sight loss. This included other professionals not understanding the progressive nature of some forms of sight loss, being directed towards online sources of support and information that were inaccessible to them, or professionals treating them inappropriately (for example, speaking to a person's guide dog rather than to the person during an appointment).

"Inside these rooms people understand, outside Bradbury Fields people think I am not blind if I put my glasses on, but the glasses help my vision. In here I can be me." - Service User

People also valued the opportunity to meet other blind and visually impaired people. Participants at the focus group talked a lot about facing negative judgement, comments, or treatment from members of the public as a result of being blind or visually impaired. People felt it was beneficial to have a space where they could come and meet people with similar experiences. This enabled people who attend Bradbury Fields to support each other, and also learn from each other about support available across the city. One person attending the focus group said it was their first time at The Bradbury Centre, and other attendees were able to offer advice, encouragement, and shared their own experiences with losing their vision. People told us they accessed quizzes, bingo, and lunches at the Bradbury Centre, as well as support and phone calls from staff members. A number of people had also attended a mental health group, which they found helpful and supportive. A small number of people we spoke to also volunteered at the Bradbury Centre and valued being able to do this.

"It is important for the blind and visually impaired to get together. We understand each other." - Service User

Impact of Covid-19

We also asked people about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the support they received from Bradbury Fields.

People told us that, during the Covid-19 lockdowns, in-person support stopped, and support was moved to telephone support. Some people told us that, particularly during the Covid lockdowns, they felt that the level of support available to different service users was varied. They felt that older and more isolated service users could have received more support from the service. While everyone we spoke to who used support at Bradbury Fields prior to the pandemic remained in touch with the service and received telephone support during the lockdowns, some people told us other visually impaired people they knew were not contacted by the service, or were only contacted infrequently.

As in-person services resumed, people told us they had noticed a change in the numbers of people attending the centre, particularly for peer support and social activities. People said that numbers of people attending groups were slowly building back up as people began to regain confidence attending in-person support. Some people expressed concern that there may be a number of people still reluctant to access in-person support, either because they are vulnerable due to other health problems, or because of increased anxiety around in-person events and accessing public transport.

What could be improved?

We asked people what they felt could be improved about the support and services from Bradbury Fields. People had a range of responses.

Waiting times for support

One person who was accessing Bradbury Fields for the first time told us that they had waited six months to access support since being signposted by St Paul's Eye Clinic. They said they were unsure what support was available from Bradbury Fields. They would have liked more information about what support was potentially available to them whilst they waited to be seen by the service.

We also received feedback from other people who had started using the service more recently about delays and long waits to be officially registered as blind, which meant they were unable to access some forms of support (including around housing and transport) whilst the process of registration was being completed.

Information about available support

Other service users also told us they would like more information about the support available from Bradbury Fields, as well as about support they could access from other organisations in the city. People felt that while support was available, they weren't always aware of particular groups, organisation, or forms of support until they asked about this directly, or were informed by other service users.

Some people said they would prefer to be contacted by the centre about upcoming activities, events, or support in different ways. One person told us they would like to be texted about activities for the week ahead, rather than receiving an email with this information, as they found email more difficult to use in an accessible way.

Location of The Bradbury Centre

A number of people felt that the Bradbury Centre's location on Youens Way was out of the way or difficult to access, as it is far outside the city centre and does not have good public transport connections. Some people used Merseylink (a dial-a-ride service operated by Merseytravel for people with disabilities or health conditions who struggle to use public transport) to get to the Bradbury Centre. However, when this option was not available to them, they struggled to travel to The Bradbury Centre. People suggested that an office or building located more centrally might make the service more accessible to others.

Promotion of services and support

People also felt Bradbury Fields should be more widely promoted, including in hospitals and health settings, and in local media such as the radio. Some people at the focus group said they were concerned that there may be blind or visually impaired people in Liverpool who were not accessing support from the service, for a number of reasons. This included stigma or shame around being visually impaired or needing support, as well as being unaware of available support.

Some people also told us they felt the name 'Bradbury Fields' was not helpful in raising the profile of the service among blind and visually impaired people, as it was not a name directly associated with sight loss. This feedback generally came from service users who has been with the service for multiple decades and had started accessing support when Bradbury Fields was still known as the Liverpool Voluntary Society for the Blind.

People also wanted to see more education for the public and professionals around blindness and visual impairment, through awareness campaigns and educational talks in schools and other settings. They felt this might reduce stigma around sight loss, and negative interactions with professionals or members of the public. Many people we spoke to shared negative stories of being gossiped about, stared at, and being treated inappropriately by

professionals in other settings. The impact of this ranged from being a source of irritation and frustration for people, to impacting negatively on people's mental health, confidence being in public, and ability to access appropriate support.

Equipment

Whilst people found equipment helpful, some people commented that it was often expensive to buy. Sometimes people felt they did not get the best use out of costly equipment. Some people wanted to meet with staff more regularly to learn about equipment, or would appreciate support in accessing more general items such as CD players.

Additional staffing for greater support

One person suggested that it would be good for the centre to employ a number of dedicated workers to support vulnerable and elderly service users. They recognised that this might not be possible under current funding, but felt that service users without family support should have greater support from the centre.

Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub

We also received feedback from a number of people about the closure of the Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub, and the recent merger of Bradbury Fields and the Catholic Blind Institute (which previously ran the Sight Loss Learning Hub). The Sight Loss Learning Hub previously offered training courses to people with sight loss to help maintain their independence and live safely in their own homes. The centre was also an important site for people with visual impairments to meet others and make and maintain social connections. Changes to funding and contractual arrangements have led to changes in the services offered at the Sight Loss Learning Hub over the years. Bradbury Fields has taken over a lot of the training and rehabilitation work previously offered at the Sight Loss Learning Hub. In October 2021, Bradbury Fields and the Catholic Blind Institute merged, with Bradbury Fields becoming a division of the Institute.

People who had attended courses at Christopher Grange fed back they felt it was sad the Sight Loss Learning Hub had closed and reduced its activities over the years. This was particularly the case with feedback from people who had been attending Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange for a number of decades, and for those who were long-standing service users at Christopher Grange. Some people felt they had been well-supported by staff, particularly where they had relationships with staff members who used to work at Christopher Grange who now work at Bradbury Fields. However, other people felt like they had not been given a lot of information about changes to the services, and wanted more clarity about how support and services on offer would be affected. People who had previously attended Christopher Grange in-person also told us that they initially found it difficult to access support in a new building they were less familiar with and would need time to adjust to accessing support in a new space.

Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub engagement one-to-one interviews.

Two Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub service users expressed the wish to have one-to-one interviews instead of attending the focus group.

One service user talked about the Christopher Grange Sight Loss service hub. They felt that this service had not only helped them but also made them aware of others that they were able to care for.

"It empowered me to help which also helped me"

They were however critical of some of the issues concerning Bradbury Fields. They said that they hadn't received any information about GDPR, therefore they didn't know how they would keep personal information safe. During Covid, they did not have any phone calls to see how they were doing, and they thought the communication was generally poor. There was often a delay in getting equipment sorted and too much bureaucracy. The service user expressed frustration as it took them a long time to learn how to use their cane.

The service user was particularly critical of the Board Members. They suggested that Board needed to be more diverse and have regular meetings with service users.

"The governance structure needs improving, I would expect the board to be more skilled in adult social care training and sight loss services. I would like the Board to be made up of experts AND service users with lived experiences."

"It needs to be accountable to some other independent authority and I suggest an independent review for scrutiny"

The second person we interviewed was very complimentary about the services that Christopher Grange had provided; they praised a 'blind veterans' group that helped by enabling them to do day to day living chores such as ironing.

They criticised Bradbury Fields on GDPR, registration policy and its communication strategy throughout the Covid lockdown as they only got one call during that period. They were critical of the rehab services Bradbury Fields delivers, they stressed that most of the positive rehab was delivered by the blind veterans' group.

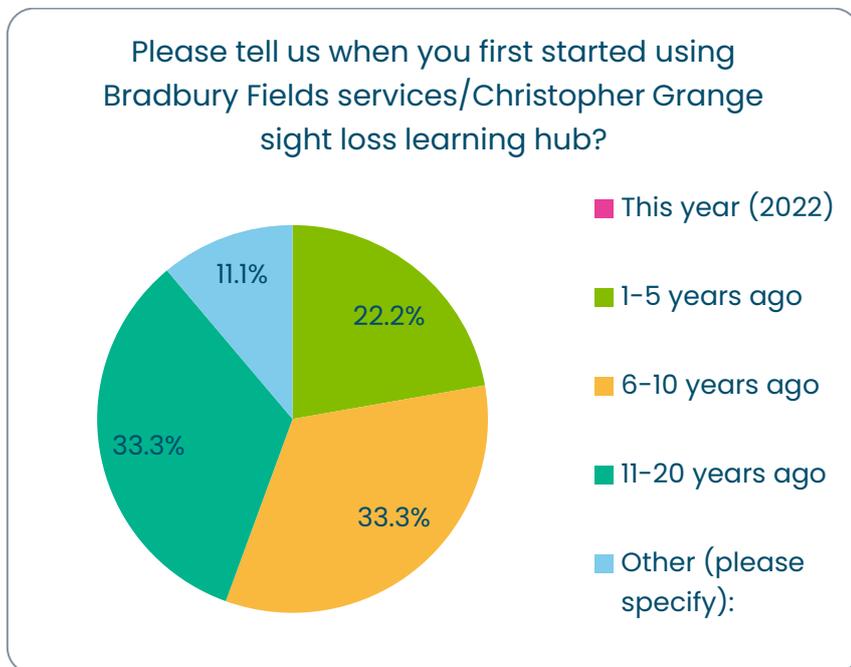
"They are working from home, and in my opinion, you can't deliver the rehab service from home."

Bradbury Fields – Smart Survey Data

People who were unable to attend our focus group were given the option of responding to a Smart Survey online. The survey covered similar questions to those we discussed with focus group attendees. We received a total of 10 responses to this survey and the feedback is set out below. Please note that some people chose not to answer all the available questions.

Q1 Please tell us when you first started using Bradbury Fields services/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

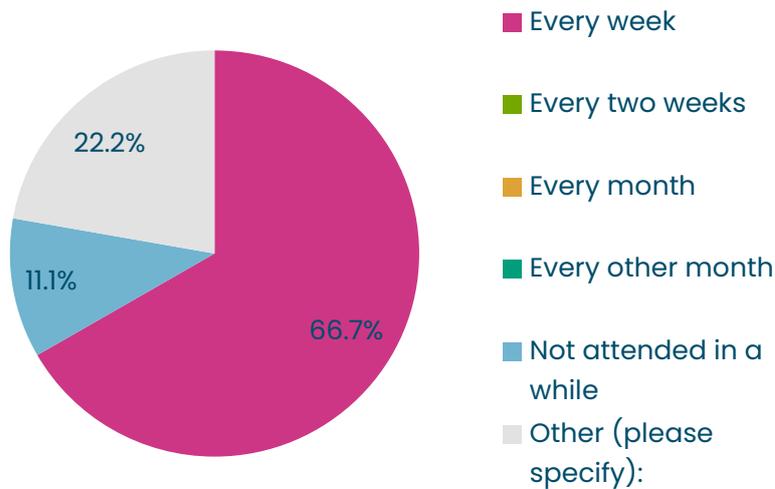
9 people answered this question and a third (33.3%) told us they'd used the services for over a decade (11 – 20 years). Another third had first used the services within the last 6-10 years, with 2 people (22.2%) having started using the services within the last 5 years. One person (11.1%) told us that they had first used the services in 1975 – almost 50 years ago.



Q2 How often do you use Bradbury Fields services/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

Of the 9 people who answered this question, two thirds (66.7%) used the services every week, with 2 people selecting the 'Other' option. Of these, one told us they attended 2 or 3 times a week and the other said they "Used to attend until 2017 then had other commitments. Used to use monthly." One person said they had not attended in a while.

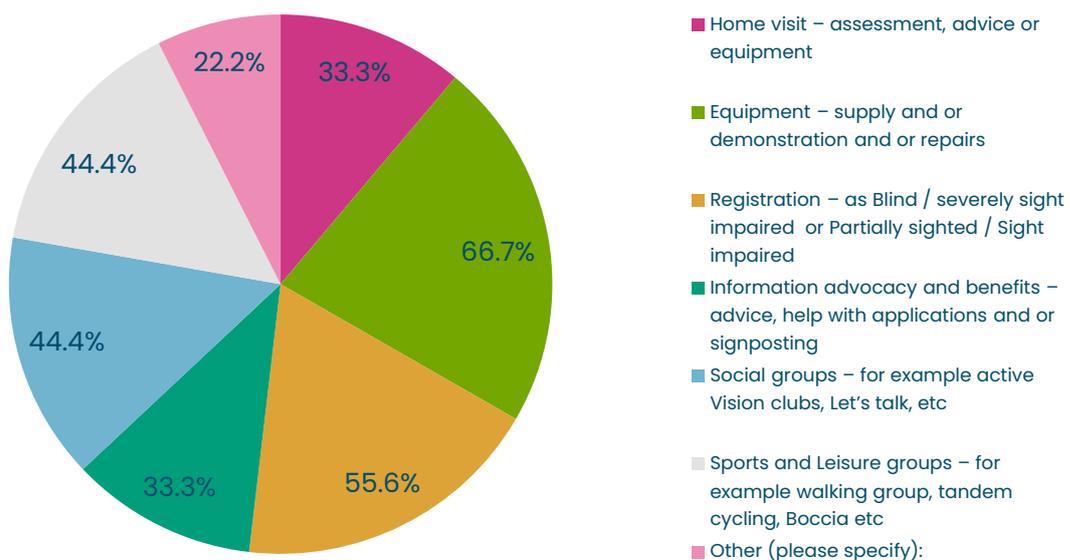
How often do you use Bradbury Fields services/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?



Q3 Which Bradbury Fields services/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub have you used? (Please tick all that apply)

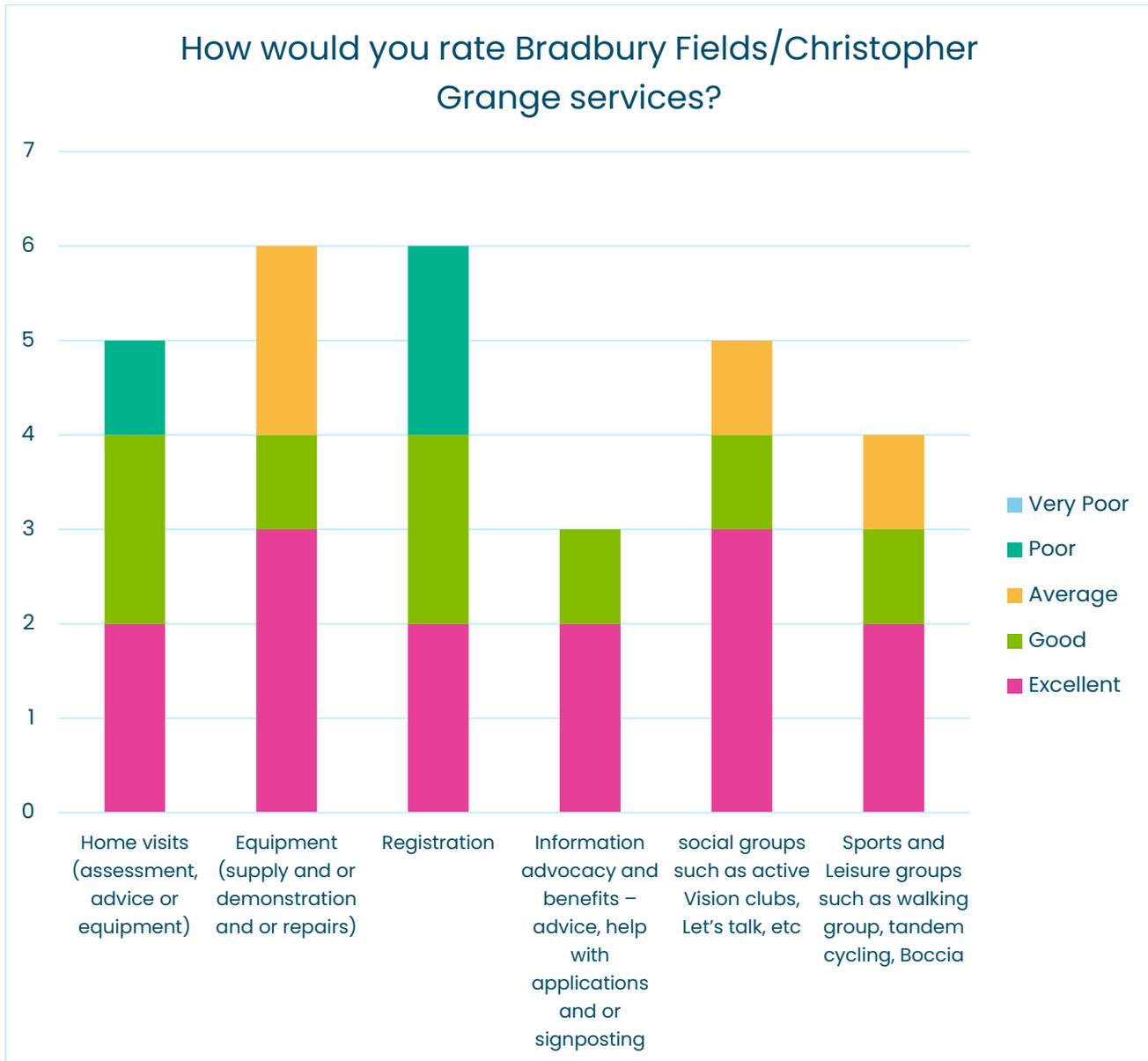
Again, 9 people responded to this question. The most frequently used service was Equipment, with 6 people 66.7% using this. 5 (55.6%) people answered Registration, and 4 people (44.4%) said Social Groups. There were no services which were not used.

Which Bradbury Fields services/ Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub have you used?
(Please tick all that apply)



Q4 – Q9 How would you rate Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub services?

We asked people to rate the 6 main strands of the Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange services, if they had used them, noting that not all services would be applicable to everyone. We have summarised the responses to these 6 questions in the chart below, with further commentary beneath.



Q4 How would you rate Home visits (assessment, advice or equipment) from Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

5 people told us they had used this service. 2 said that Home Visits were Excellent and a further 2 said they were Good. One person felt that Home Visits were Poor.

Q5 How would you rate Equipment (supply and or demonstration and or repairs) from Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

6 people said they had used this service, of whom 3 said it was Excellent and 2 felt it was Average. One person thought it was Good.

Q6 How would you rate Registration – as Blind / severely sight impaired or partially sighted / Sight impaired from Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

This service had the most mixed reviews. 6 people had used the service and 2 rated it Excellent, whilst another 2 said it was Very Good. However, 2 felt it was Poor.

Q7 How would you rate Information advocacy and benefits – advice, help with applications and or signposting from Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

Of the 3 people who had used this service, 2 said it was Excellent and 1 said it was Very Good.

Q8 How would you rate social groups such as Active Vision clubs, Let's Talk, etc from Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

5 people had used these services, of whom 3 said they were Excellent and 1 said they were Very Good. One person also rated it as Average.

Q9 How would you rate Sports and Leisure groups such as walking group, tandem cycling, Boccia from Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange sight loss learning hub?

Of the 4 people who had used these groups, 2 said they were Excellent, 1 said they were Very Good and 1 rated them as Average.

Q10 What difference has Bradbury Fields/ Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub made to your life?

9 people answered this question. Their answers were:

“Christopher Grange- made me care about others. Brought me to the realisation that I am astute and capable, it empowered me to help which helped me. I started caring and thinking I need to help more and make sure people get dealt with properly, it isn't good enough and wanted to change that. In the past when first started, access to the mobility team and rehab team and everything seemed to be more well connected.”

“Christopher Grange- made up with the service. Expectations were met, I benefitted from it. Blind Veteran's helped mostly. Helped with ironing, daily life and living skills. Other things about the home it helped me learn about how to do chores. There was a group that taught about the condition 'macular degeneration' which helped people with the condition understand what it was and how it affected them which was great. Apart from a hours Mobility Training in my area, I haven't received any other training at or from the Bradbury Fields,

nor have I attended or took part in its Social or Recreational Activities. I have attended their Centre, as the Blind Veterans UK have an Office there."

"Being able to live as independently as possible. It has supported me in gaining confidence and the appropriate skills to help myself."

"My answers are based on support from Christopher Grange, Bradbury have never supported me."

"Something to look forward to each week with people with similar conditions."

"I felt very isolated and depressed before I was signposted to the services of BRADBURY FIELDS. I have made many new friends and joined various groups and become a volunteer as it has made me more confident"

"My rehab officer has a great understanding and knowledge of those who have both visual and hearing impairment, I cannot fault her prompt response to any inquiries, advice, or home visits. Communication is excellent. She's very knowledgeable about equipment. Bradbury Fields cater to visually impaired people, the staff are very friendly and helpful, they have the knowledge and consideration to provide one to one attention."

"It is reassuring to know it is there for advice when needed."

"It's given me a lot more confidence and I've made good friends and I learned a lot. Christopher Grange helped a lot of people."

Q11 How would you improve Bradbury Fields/ Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub?

8 people answered this question. Their answers were:

"Never got any information about GDPR, never got any information about how they would keep personal information safe. Never had any phone calls to see how I was doing, even through covid. Communication is poor. There is often a delay on getting equipment sorted, too much bureaucracy. Took me a long time to learn how to use cane. Felt that the service was 'not for me', didn't want it to be all about me, but found a need for others which empowered me to be able to provide a service that they're entitled to but people don't know what they're entitled to. Bradbury Fields and Grange, what should be done- things need to be connected up a bit better."

Concerned about not delivering in house rehabilitation - wondering about what consultation they went through to decide people would want rehab at home instead. Structurally needs improving - governance level, would expect the board to be more skilled on adult social care training, sight loss services. I would want board to be made up of experts AND service users with lived experience. Board needs to be accountable by some other authority."

Suggest an independent review for scrutiny, tried to be on the board myself but got passed on to CEO. Board has never met the service users themselves. Don't get invited to AGM's, as service users thought they would have an open policy, it feels like a 'closed shop'. No one inspects the services, not the council/commissioners. There is no 'care' at the service for very ill people."

During covid services were very poor, linked up with other people but branded as their own services, by helping deliver. Took a long time for services to open back up after lockdown when they should have done earlier. Couldn't deliver certain services due to the nature of them- cane training, braille etc... Had no support as a volunteer, no duty of care unless I engage with services. Maybe should utilise volunteers for helping people who, for example, can't use canes due to walking sticks, to help them go to the shops or other things. If they had a hub where people could go for rehab, where people could go to get to know the staff. The rehab officers need to get to know service users more, there is a delay to assessment, they don't offer a personalised service. There is not effort to inform of entitlement. Not a wraparound service where family are supported to come to terms with sight loss of service users. Council should monitor more on a regular basis or have an overseer 'task group' to control it."

"Bradbury fields doesn't provide sporting or physical activities. Hasn't provided the sight loss service like it was commissioned to, don't think it's fit enough to provide the service. Not enough effort into the rehabilitation service over the social things. Registering, GDPR, needs to be improved, more monitoring to inform councillors. During covid got a phone call a few days after but no other one after that. Some people never got a phone call at all, said they were delivering parcels but in my opinion they didn't. They are working from home, and in my opinion, you can't deliver the rehab service from home. "

Two of the survey respondents also asked to speak to us at greater length in 1-2-1 interviews where they outlined their concerns about the merger between Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub in greater detail:

"The questions seemed to be about two meetings; one on the Bradbury Fields Trust, a Third Sector "Not for Profit" Voluntary Community Organisation Charity that relies on Public and Private Donations, and one on the Bradbury Fields Trust and the Contract and the Commission it was awarded to provide and deliver as the Managing Agency on behalf of the Council's / State's Statutory Sight Loss Service for Adults, from which it may make a Profit from the Commission if it meets the Councils / State's Statutory Requirements and Legal Compliances, and it is used and spent correctly. I tried to base my answers on this issue, as Rehabilitation was and still is my concern, so I apologise if my answers rambled on a bit and off the subject.

I had hoped to discuss the so called "Merger". The Amalgamation of two or more Companies (Entities) into one New Company (one Entity), which requires it to become a New Single Entity Company where they lose their own Legal Entities and Identities (Under that Agreement the Bradbury Fields no longer exist as a Trust or a Company by Limited Guarantee; which is distinct from a Joint Venture, where two come together to work on a project or a series of projects without them losing their Legal Identities, whereas a Consortium is where three or more Entities come together for a project or a series of projects without losing their own Identity and without creating a further entity. What seems to have been forgotten is that the CEO of the then Bradbury Fields Trust admitted that the Service it provided was both inefficient and ineffective in meeting the needs of the Registered Sight Impaired Adults. Some 75% of which are Clinically Diagnosed when over the Working Age."

"Additional staffing would be useful to speed up the initial assessment process and increase the number of training sessions in regard to rehabilitation."

"The Hub is closing therefore support is lost."

"Not sure. Maybe more advertising in various locations: doctor surgeries, St Pauls eye department"

"Bradbury Fields is not well known, the name "Bradbury Fields" has nothing to do with visual impairment, and therefore promotion is difficult. The location is not easily accessible, in particular if you're coming via public transport. The building itself is not well signposted, and the layout is confusing - there are several buildings there and it is unclear where Bradbury Fields is. More must be done to promote this fantastic service. Perhaps engaging in face-to-face promotion with potential service users would be beneficial, for example visiting a care home or hospital to make people aware of their services. Some people are nervous or reluctant to access help, and a face-to-face interaction with the lovely staff might change their minds."

"It seems to already offer excellent facilities".

"Extend the things the things we used to get at CG, like the IT, cooking, and do more home visits. And have more people to help with shopping. Also they used to teach people methods to iron, and how to prevent burning themselves with the iron."

Bradbury Fields- summary of recommendations from service users

- The centre is out of the way, and it need to be more accessible
- Services should be promoted more widely
- Hospital and other health staff to have more awareness/sensitivity to the needs of blind people and Bradbury Fields could help with that. A name change to ensure people knew what Bradbury Fields is about
- More diverse board members
- More communication between service users and Board members
- Better communication with service users on what services there are and what the service users are entitled to

6. Demographics

MSDP participant demographics

- Participants lived in the L2, L9, L11, L12, L10, L16, L27, L35, postcode areas
- Eight were women and three were men and one who preferred not to say.
- 11 of the participants described themselves as 'heterosexual' and 1 described themselves as 'gay/lesbian'.
- Ten identified as White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh. One identified as White: Irish. One preferred not to say.
- All 10 describe themselves as having a disability. 2 preferred not to say. In regard to disability, one person said they had a sensory impairment, one said they had a mental health condition, two said they had a long term condition and one said they preferred not to say. Three had long term conditions and three didn't (A long-term condition is an illness that cannot be cured. It can usually be controlled with medicines or other treatments. Examples of long-term conditions include diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, epilepsy, asthma, and some mental health).

Bradbury Fields participant demographics

- Participants lived in the L4, L5, L7, L9, L11, L13, and L14 areas. Some people we spoke to told us only that they lived in Liverpool, and did not say which area.
- We heard from 4 women, and 4 men. One person preferred not to tell us their gender.
- Three people we heard from were age 50-64, two were age 65-70, and three were age 80+. One person we heard from was age 19-24.
- Seven people we heard from described themselves as heterosexual or straight. Two people preferred not to tell us their sexual orientation.
- We asked people about their ethnicity, using categories from the census. Four people we heard from identified as White British. Two people identified as White: Other. One person identified as Black/Black British: Caribbean, and one person identified as Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White. One person preferred not to tell us their ethnicity.
- All 9 people who answered our demographic questions identified as being disabled. Seven people said they had a sensory impairment; four people had a physical or mobility impairment; one person had a learning disability or difficulty; and one person had a mental health condition. Two people told us they had a long-term health condition, and two people told us they had another disability. One person preferred not to tell us about more information about the type of disability they had.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the feedback gathered from conducting the focus groups and carrying out several one-to-one interviews were mostly positive. All respondents agreed that if these organisations did not deliver their services the impact on their lives would be catastrophic. However, some of them raised some concerns about issues such as not knowing exactly what services are delivered by organisations.

In general, the service users in both organisations made a lot of positive comments about the services. Many also commented that more awareness sessions needed to be carried out about sensory impairment in communities, particularly for health professionals and social workers.

Service users who attended the Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub's focus group were a lot more satisfied with services that were provided than those who were interviewed individually. They were pleased with activities particularly the sport activities which had a positive impact on their mental health. Some of the people who were service user of Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub before merging with Bradbury Fields expressed some sadness about the merger and felt sadness about how Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub had been reduced over the years. The general feedback was that they understood the change and merger and agreed that, with more time passing, things were improving.

The governance of Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub, and its GDPR policy were raised by the two one-to-one interviews which we carried out. They also were not wholly satisfied with the rehab programme and the voluntary services of Bradbury Fields. This was in contrast to those service users who attended the focus group who were very satisfied with all the services that Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Learning Hub were delivering.

Our engagement project should not be taken as thorough investigation or as representative of MSDP and Bradbury Fields and Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning hub service users. It is important to note the range of experiences of those members of the public we spoke to during our focus group. It is also useful to note that people new to services and experiencing complex situations may have a different experience.

Throughout the engagement, one of the main messages from service users was the importance of services provided by MSDP and Bradbury Fields/Christopher Grange Sight Loss Learning Hub to their day-to-day lives. People described the benefit of the services to their mental health and wellbeing and ability to be independent and connect to their community and others. The consensus among service users was that the services continue to be vitally needed and that ideally, they would like there to be more funding to allow delivery to be improved.

8. Who are Healthwatch Liverpool

Healthwatch Liverpool was established under The Health and Social Care Act 2012 and came into being in April 2013. Healthwatch Liverpool provides an opportunity for citizens and communities to have a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided within their area.

We enable people to share their views and concerns about local health and social care services and to understand that their contribution will help build a picture of where services are doing well, and where they can be improved.

We also provide people with information about their choices and what to do when things go wrong; this includes signposting people to the relevant provider and supporting individuals who want to complain about NHS services.

We provide authoritative, evidence-based feedback with informed recommendations to organisations responsible for commissioning or delivering local health and social care services.



healthwatch Liverpool

Healthwatch Liverpool
151 Dale Street
Liverpool
L2 2AH

www.healthwatchliverpool.co.uk
t: 0300 77 77 007
e: enquiries@healthwatchliverpool.co.uk
 [@HW_Liverpool](https://twitter.com/HW_Liverpool)
 [Facebook.com/HWLiverpool](https://www.facebook.com/HWLiverpool)