

Under the bonnet of unrestricted *with The Bromley Trust*

March 2024

In this series, funders share their thinking about unrestricted funding and invite their funded partners to reflect on the difference it makes.



Unrestricted funding: More meaningful, more impact

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THE BROMLEY TRUST
HUMAN RIGHTS | PRISON REFORM

The Bromley Trust funds specialist charities helping to bring about positive social change through their work with marginalised people in the justice system or people who are in need of human rights protection in the UK. We also support and connect our grantees with those who can help them achieve their aims and our collective vision of a better society.

The Trust was set up by Toby Bromley in 1989 to combat human rights violations and to help offset ‘man’s inhumanity to man’. He wanted to tackle the root causes of problems and bring about changes in policy and practice as well as help individuals. That’s why we’ve always looked at the overall goals of the organisations that we work with and supported them as best we can, usually through unrestricted funding.

Aligning our mission and goals

We choose to invest in partners whose vision for change aligns with one of our two strategic goals. We look for organisations that are well run, which work collaboratively with others, and that build meaningful relationships with the people that they seek to help.

We value the expertise of the organisations we fund. At the start of the pandemic our biggest concern was that many charities would close. Our grantees were particularly affected as they were working in prisons or immigration removal centres which were quickly closed to outside agencies and were some of the last areas to open up post lockdown. These organisations are very hard to replicate – they are specialists, working

in very demanding environments. Unrestricted funding was vital to helping them navigate these challenging times and develop new ways of meeting people’s needs.

It’s not just about challenges, it’s also about opportunities

Social change is complex. Opportunities to engage with the media or with politicians on issues often arise in response to unplanned events, sadly sometimes tragedies such as deaths in custody. These cannot be identified in advance in a three-year grant application. Having unrestricted funding enables grantees to respond to opportunities to bring about broader changes to policy or practice as they arise. Being able to act in a timely way helps to maximise the impact they can have as a result.

Working in institutional settings such as prisons can be difficult, and charities often have to be very flexible and adaptive. Funders which require grantees to achieve very prescriptive outputs can find this frustrating. Our experience is that the answer isn’t to stop supporting this work, it is to do it in a more effective way. And for us, that is about unrestricted multi-year funding, and supportive and trusting relationships.

Unrestricted funding is more meaningful

Our grantees value our multi-year unrestricted funding, but also our trusting and supportive relationship. We have much more open and meaningful conversations because, instead of trying to performance manage our grantees by asking questions such as why they worked with 20 people instead of 30 people, we focus more on the broader context within which they're working. Where are the opportunities for change? Where are the barriers? What can we do to help them meet their overall aims?

This makes us a better and more informed partner for our grantees. We use the insights gathered from our conversations with grantees to help us support and connect them, whether that is with other charities, funders or others working for change in these areas. It also enables us to reflect on what's happening in our sector and adapt our own practice, because we've got a more holistic view of what's going on.

Why unrestricted funding matters

Multi-year unrestricted funding provides stability for grantees, but also the flexibility, power, and control to set their own strategies. They focus their work knowing that they've got some choice over how they're spending their funds. They're not having to plan their work solely around an external decision about what will or won't be funded. They can have the ability to choose and set priorities with the people that they work with, to ensure that they can best meet their needs and achieve the most impact they can.

Advice for other funders

It doesn't have to be all or nothing

We encourage other funders to give unrestricted funding because it is more enabling and contributes to greater impact. While we recognise that not everyone will be able to do this, we think there is a strong case for funders placing as few restrictions as they can on grants. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. Maybe you've got a particular programme or a discrete area of work where you could try unrestricted funding, invest in those partners, and build those relationships. Or maybe you could broadly restrict a grant to an area of work or location, rather than a specific project or post. And always include a proportionate share of organisational overheads in your grant – projects can't run without them!

Unrestricted funding supports wider change

Naomi Delap, Director, Birth Companions



Birth Companions is a women's charity dedicated to tackling inequalities and disadvantage during pregnancy, birth, and early motherhood. Founded in 1996 to support pregnant women and new mothers in Holloway Prison, we work to meet the needs of women living in the most challenging situations in prison and in the community.



Pregnancy, birth and the early months of motherhood can be a challenging prospect, and for women and birthing people in prison this is magnified several times over. At Birth Companions we provide practical and emotional support services to pregnant women and new mothers in the prison system and the community. But this isn't all we do. We also campaign to reduce inequalities in the criminal justice system, as well as in the maternity, social services, and immigration systems.

Our woman-centred, trauma-informed approach shapes the nature of how we deliver our services. This enables us to be flexible and to respond to women's individual needs in many different settings, and to adapt to circumstances. We're continually feeding information and insight through from our services – spotting problems and solutions as they're happening – into the policy research and influencing work that we do.

It can be difficult to secure funding for policy, influencing and lived experience work. It doesn't easily fit into funding programmes with three-year cycles. Unrestricted funding enables us to invest in that area of our work, which is brilliant because it brings about wider change. We know that change takes a long time: it's often so slow, but it's so important. Unrestricted funding enables us to keep going.

Why unrestricted funding matters

Unrestricted funding means that we can make decisions about the services we offer. For example, if there's a gap in restricted funding for a particular service, we could fill that with unrestricted funding as a bridge. We can choose to provide additional support to women if statutory funding isn't able to meet all their needs. And we can invest in innovation and trialling something new. All of these things add up to delivering better and more consistent services that are designed in direct response to the needs that women experience.

On the policy and engagement side, unrestricted funding gives us the freedom to go where the work logically takes us and to evolve in a way that is responsive to what we see the need being. Unrestricted funding supports agility and entrepreneurialism. It allows us to pivot and try new things.

Advice for other funders

Unrestricted funding is integral to having a relationship between a funder and grantee that is mature, based on mutual trust, and, as far as possible, shares power. It gives us the flexibility to put the money where it's most needed.

Our unrestricted funders know us best

Penny Parker, Founder, StandOut

Established in 2018, [StandOut](#) is an award-winning charity that empowers people to make positive change, realise their potential, and rebuild their lives after prison. Our unique programme begins in prison with coaching and practical support and continues after release, for as long as someone needs us.



During the COVID-19 lockdowns, we discovered that people in prison were doubly isolated: isolated in their prison cells for up to 23 hours a day, and isolated again when vital services moved to remote working, with no access to the majority of people in prison. We saw that a lot of interaction was reduced to sheets of paper stuffed under cell doors. But people were still being released at the end of sentences and there was no one offering any support at all. So, we set up a weekly tour of the prison, talking to people who were preparing for release. And we helped them to prepare for a transformed world – a world where everyone was locked up in their houses, but which people in prison may have only read about or seen on TV.

We were able to do this because we are a small, young, and agile organisation. Our unrestricted funding enables us to be flexible and respond to the changing landscape. Funders offering greater flexibility during the pandemic gave us an opportunity to grow our confidence, strength, skills, and experience. When lockdown restrictions eased and went back to normal, we found we were better equipped to do what we do.

Why unrestricted funding matters

It's our unrestricted funders (over 60% of our current funding) who know us best. They are behind our mission. And they're interested in everything: in what we're doing; and in the real needs of the people in prison who we're working with. They also want to make sure that we've got good governance, that we've got good organisational structure, that we're able to support the delivery team, and that we've got the strength that leads to long term impact. Some of the best due diligence around our work has come from unrestricted funders who've dug deep into every aspect of the organisation, to be confident of the trust they have placed in funding us.

We know what the people we work with want and need. Our mission is well grounded, and we want to stay focused on that. Unrestricted funding enables us to do this. Without unrestricted funding we might have to align with what someone else thinks is needed, and that would risk us doing something slightly different – to the detriment of what we know from the people we support. With restricted funding, it's more challenging to say that we want to go in a different direction or deliver something somewhere else.

Advice for other funders

Supporting the bigger picture

I encourage funders to look at the bigger picture and to look at an organisation's sources of funding. How is the whole organisation delivering? Restricted or project funding often doesn't reflect the full cost of things because it tends to focus on a particular slice of your work, and it relies on core funders stepping in to do the rest and support the whole organisation.

Funders should also ask themselves what impact they are wanting to contribute to. Restricted funding focuses on the nuts and

bolts, numbers, and particular programmes, but this data doesn't tell the whole story. If you are working within a complex system to address enormous challenges, you have to recognise that the journey can be up and down and roundabout. Funders can have a much greater impact by being courageous, by zooming out to look at the bigger picture and thinking about longer term change that serves both the people that we're working with and wider society.



Credit: Andy Aitchison, StandOut

Join the Open and Trusting community



The Bromley Trust is one of over 100 UK funders who are working together to adopt more open and trusting practices that make life easier for those they fund. We recognise that each funder faces different constraints, and we believe that everyone can go further. By joining the Open and Trusting community, you can:

Access our Community of Practice

Held online three times a year, our expert facilitators hold discussions between funders where people share live challenges, offer peer support and help shape ideas for new research.

Engage your trustees

We run bespoke sessions for individual boards to introduce the Open and Trusting commitments, highlighting key areas for practice development and exploring specific barriers or concerns about going further.

Participate in research

We are currently focusing on four areas of research – unrestricted funding; grant reporting; equity and applications; and public agency funding. Taking part can enable deeper reflection and practice development within your organisation, and/or with funded organisations and partners. It's also an opportunity to share your learning with a wider audience.

Be held accountable

We create spaces for dialogue between charities and funders, which provide opportunities for challenge within the context of a community on a positive journey, learning and improving together. This includes a collaborative review every two years which you can read more about in *Charities in the driving seat: Findings from the first Open and Trusting Grant-making accountability process*.

You can sign up to Open and Trusting on [our website](#), by clicking the button in the top right of the page.

If you would like to find out more, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us by emailing enquiries@ivar.org.uk