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## Catholic charities feeling pinch of welfare cuts

Catholic charities have been pushed 'to the edge of their capacity' by the impact of the UK Government's £12 billion cuts to welfare, the English Church's social action arm has warned.

A report collating the experiences of three of the Catholic Social Action Network's (CSAN) member organisations in the five years since welfare cuts were implemented said that staff felt the tightened system marked a return to 'Victorian poverty.'

The three member charities whose staff and clients were interviewed for the report, which was launched in London last Tuesday, were Nugent Care in Liverpool, Brushstrokes in Birmingham and Caritas Anchor House in London.

In the report, CSAN concluded that the system operated an 'inflexible' sanctioning process and was perceived to have moved from compassion to coldness. Clients, they warned, were living in poverty and some were experiencing dramatic increases in mental health issues. As a result, charities are frustrated and overwhelmed at the same time as seeing a massive increase in demand for their services.

The report concludes: "One of the most devastating impacts of welfare reform and change in welfare culture is the erosion of human dignity and self worth."

The report is the latest in a series of interventions on welfare by the Catholic Church. Last year, the leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, called the government's austerity programme a disgrace for leaving so many people in destitution.

Cathy Corcoran, a CSAN trustee and chief executive of the Cardinal Hume Centre—working with vulnerable people in London—said: "The changes to welfare benefits have come thick and fast, with barely any time to properly evaluate the impact. Reform was necessary, but not when it hits the most vulnerable people."

The report calls for the end of benefits sanctions for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties, as well as better training for Job Centre Plus Staff, and for the introduction of an explanatory system into the process by which benefits are withheld.



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