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Government's welfare cuts 'mark return to Victorian poverty'

14 July 2015 15:20 by Liz Dodd



Catholic charities have been pushed "to the edge of their capacity" by the impact of the Government's cuts to welfare, the Church's social action arm warned this week.

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 on Tuesday,

were Nugent Care in Liverpool, Brushstrokes in Birmingham and Caritas Anchor House in London.

In the report, which was launched a week after the Government announced a further £12bn in cuts to welfare, 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.

Cathy Corcoran, a CSAN trustee and Chief Executive of the Cardinal Hume Centre, which works 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. Yes, 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.

For a full report see *The Tablet* this week.

Above: Mark (name changed) in his room at Caritas Anchor House. Photo: CSAN



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Margaret Hebblethwaite

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