

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO DAY CENTRE SERVICES?

VOICES FROM FRONTLINE STAFF

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Health Services Management Centre



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This project is a collaboration between UNISON and Dr Catherine Needham from the Health Services Management Centre at the University of Birmingham. The project gathered data on the closure programme for local authority-funded day centres for people with an assessed social care need. It used a survey of UNISON members working in day centres to examine:

- the extent of day centre closures
- the consultative measures used by local authorities prior to closing centres
- the alternative provision made for service users and staff following closure
- other issues relating to day centres that members wanted to raise

The survey ran online, using SurveyMonkey software, from January to March 2012. An email link to the survey was circulated by UNISON to its social care members working in local authority and independent sector day centres. It was sent out to 200 UNISON branches and had 123 respondents, from across all the UNISON regions except Northern Ireland.

The survey is not a representative sample of day centre staff. It provides an account of the changes which are taking place in some day centre services, and highlights the issues which other areas may face as personalisation and funding cuts reshape social care provision.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview.....	3
Day Centre Closures	5
Limiting Access.....	7
Consulting on Changes.....	10
Redeployment and Redundancy.....	11
Personal Budgets	14
Conclusions	16
References	17

OVERVIEW

Early in 2010 UNISON launched, *Who Cares, Who Pays?* That report into personalisation and social care warned that personalisation was likely to have a negative impact on day centre provision: 'some forms of provision may not be viable at all. For example, local authorities and voluntary organisations may no longer be able to provide day centres if numbers making use of them fall' (Land and Himmelweit, 2010, p.23).

Two years later it is possible to take stock of the impact of changes to social care day services in a context of substantial funding cuts, a move to personal budgets and a failure to secure a sustainable funding settlement for the long-term (Dilnot, 2012). This document contains the reflections of frontline social care staff about how day centre services are changing in their area.

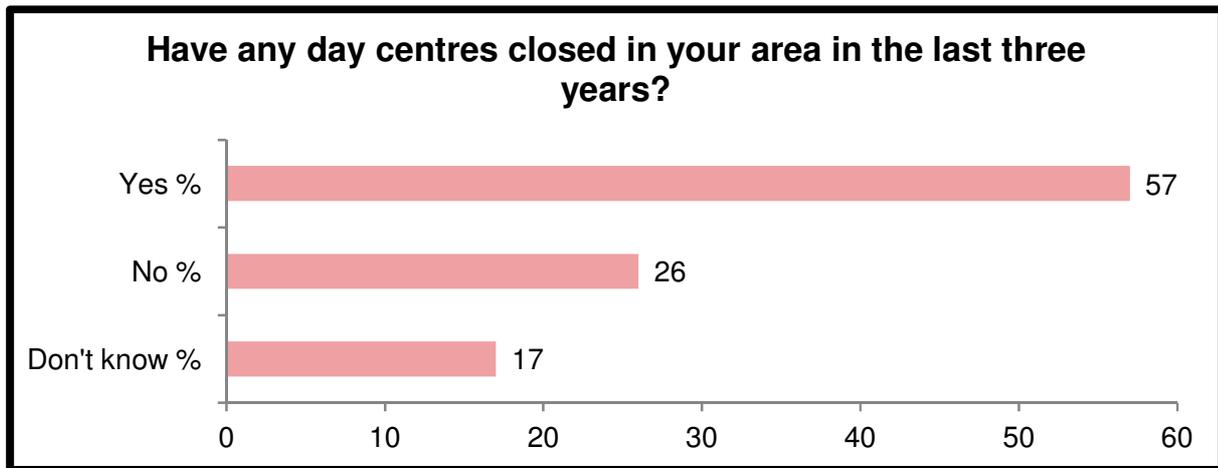
Key findings from the responses:

- Over half (56%) of respondents noted that day centres are closing in their area. People are being moved to centres further away from home, being combined in multi-use centres and/or spending more time at home. 30% of those experiencing closures stated that no alternative provision was made for at least some service users, whilst a further 20% reported that they didn't know if any alternative was available.
- 71% of respondents had noticed changes to day centre provision in the last three years (aside from centre closures). Eligibility criteria are changing, for example to include only people with critical or substantial need or prohibiting people in residential care from accessing day services.
- Two-thirds of survey respondents (66%) indicated that charges had been introduced or increased for those using the service. Charges related to attendance, meals and transport.
- Consultation exercises by local authorities about closures and changes to day service provision were widely perceived to be inadequate either because the consultation period was too short, responses were ignored and/or insufficient attention was given to what people would do in the absence of the day centre.
- Just over half of respondents (55%) noted changes to staff terms and conditions, with over two-thirds of those (70%) noting changes in the number of staff. Although some redundancies are taking place, a more common response was that staff were being redeployed. Often this involves moving to a job which is more demanding and/or less well paid.
- Terms and conditions are changing, such as reduction in holiday and sick pay and cuts in hours.

- Two thirds of respondents (65%) reported changes to the roles that staff perform. Common themes were that staff were expected to undertake generic rather than specialised roles and to spend time working one-to-one with service users on support planning.
- The introduction of personal budgets has made a substantial impact on how day centre services are costed and delivered. Some respondents saw such budgets as resulting in positive changes for service users, such as more flexibility and choice. However others saw them as a smokescreen for budget cuts, which had resulted in reduced choice for users and an increase in isolation.
- Around half of respondents (52%) are aware of plans to close more day centres in the future.

DAY CENTRE CLOSURES

In the survey, over half (56%) of respondents reported that day centres have closed in their area in the last three years. Base sizes do not permit full analysis by region, although there are indications that respondents in Greater London are the most likely to have experienced closures of this type. Of those centres that have closed, the most affected user group is older people, followed by people with learning and physical disabilities, with mental health service users the least affected (although still cited by 20% of all respondents).



Half of those aware of closures gave the number of day centres affected, with a median number of closures of 2 (although three respondents had experienced 30, 20 and 12 closures respectively).

Not all respondents reported closures. One indicated that services were increasing or improving in his/her area:

*“Older People - there has been a major investment programme over 5 years to refurbish and replace all centres. New centres much better with a number specialising in dementia and some open 7 days.
Learning Disability - all centres have now been rebuilt on shared sites. Big improvement.”*

FOLLOWING DAY CENTRE CLOSURE:

Respondents reported a range of outcomes following the closure of a centre. The most common were:

- **People being transported to centres further away from their homes**

"Day centres for older people were closed at their original place, and all people moved long distances to makeshift day centres."

"Lost trips out since amalgamation, less time to do activities due to time service users get to the day centres due to pick up and travel times to and from the daycentres."

- **Different types of service users being combined in multi-use centres**

"Learning disabilities, physical disabilities, elderly day centres clumped together at mealtimes, older people cannot adjust to the noise or the lack of attention to their various health issues. The younger people are allowed to wander where they choose, causing a lot of older service users to leave the day centre services for good. The day service centres that are now used are inadequate for older people, too cold, no proper provision for constant heat during the cold spells, Too long to travel to the centres for many. No provision for them to go on trips like they could before."

- **People spending more time in their own home**

"The expectation is that they will be supported from home - even if they have a minimal amount of hours. Only those classed as complex, severe or at risk are to receive a day service."

Some respondents indicated that more 'personalised', community-based services or hubs were now available, in place of the day centre:

"Physical disability services changed from traditional day centre provision to a 'personalised' service - service users signposted to community activities/ groups etc and a weekly drop in service."

"5 Learning Disability centres are now multifunctional centres shared with leisure and cultural facilities. Centres increasingly used as a hub with more activities outwith."

However for some the transition to new services had not been a satisfactory one:

"Users were 'signposted' to alternatives which were basic and much reduced when they were given any alternatives."

"No checking with alternative day centres to see if places were available and if the same amount of days were possible"

30% of those experiencing closures stated that no alternative provision was made for at least some service users, whilst a further 20% reported that they didn't know if any alternative was available.

LIMITING ACCESS

Alongside day centre closures it was evident from the survey that many centres are changing the service that they provide. 71% of respondents had noticed changes to day centre provision in the last three years (aside from centre closures), with people with learning disabilities being the most affected. Respondents reported changes included **restricting eligibility** and **introducing charges** for users.

RESTRICTING ELIGIBILITY

Two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that restrictions were being placed on the eligibility of service users accessing day centres. This included:

- **Reducing the number of sessions that people could attend**

"Now a presumptive maxima of 5 sessions (half days) unless higher figure justified on safeguarding grounds eg at risk and no one at home during day."

- **Only allowing access to people who have critical or substantial need, according to the Fair Access to Care Services criteria**

"People do need to have a greater need than social isolation which we used to be able to use."

"Only those assessed as having complex and or multiple physical / learning disability now eligible for service."

- **Prohibiting people in residential homes from using the service**

"All service users in residential care are no longer receiving day services (due to double funding), and no new referrals have been taken in last 2 years so numbers have decreased."

"Those in residential housing can no longer access day services, no matter how long they have attended and what they may have gained. They cannot choose to spend their day in a service out of their residential provider."

- **Limiting access for self-funders**

"Those that are self-funding, even if they meet the criteria, cannot access the service."

"Even if wanting to spend their own money unable to buy day service."

- **Not offering day centre places to young people making the transition to adult social care services**

"No school leavers have come into day service for 3 years- school leavers are offered personal budgets- not directed towards day services."

Changes in referral procedure were also cited as leading to reduced eligibility for day services:

"Some referrals are only for 6 weeks. Greater emphasis on reablement which may include service users being offered voluntary sector or independent sector provisions where previously they would have been eligible for Day Care Centre provision."

In another case, people who were not attending regularly have had their entitlement to the service withdrawn:

"Elderly who have not attended for at least 4 to 6 weeks have been reassessed, roughly 98% have not met the new eligibility criteria."

Not all respondents reported a narrowing of eligibility criteria. In one case, self-funders were to be able to attend local authority day centres for the first time, although the respondent noted: *"Not sure how this will work in practice, or if they will want to use this service!"*

CHARGES

Two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that charges had been introduced or increased for those using the service. The costs were highly variable – in some cases it meant paying for tea and coffee or meals rather than getting them free. However most respondents indicated large cost rises, from a nominal fee to a full-economic cost – for example, from a minimal charge to £50 a day – which would be deducted from the personal budget of anyone eligible for local authority funding.

"Currently around £10 per day max, in future max will be actual cost of service (at least £48 per day) more for people with complexity issues subject to cap of disposable income."

"Those service users who have been deemed as able to pay, have had to choose to not come because they can't afford it or restrict their days to only one because of over-extortionate rises. Also those in receipt of benefits are also being restricted to only one - two days. Service users keep having letters sent regularly about charges to them."

"Day services are now called 'day opportunities' and a budget of £30 provided. Effectively, this rations the service and means that someone can have only one day at a day centre funded by social services. One family I reviewed recently had 3 days at a day centre. With the £30 allocated by social services, they pay for another day and so they have lost a day."

Service users with personal budgets are expected to have funds to cover these costs. However several interviewees expressed concerns that not enough money was being made available in personal budgets to fund more than essential personal care services. As one survey respondent put it,

"In my particular department most of the people I support only paid a minimal day charge. This will be increasing to approximately £50 a day. Most people cannot afford this and so will need to finish their placement in order to continue receiving essential care at home."

The introduction of transport charges was also mentioned by a number of people.

"Transport costs have arrived - £3 per day on the bus to the Centre whereas it was free."

"Day centre is now being charged plus transport and meal prices have increased and are increasing again."

CHANGES TO MEALS

Cost-saving has also put pressure on the meals that are provided at day centres:

"the older people using the day centre at weekends now have to have meals on wheels not on the day cooking."

"Cooks abolished in favour of frozen meals"

Around half of respondents are also aware of plans to make **further day centre closures** in the future. These closures impact on all groups of users, but particularly on those with learning disabilities (with 69% of respondents expecting closures in those services) and older people (57%).

CONSULTING ON CHANGES

Respondents were asked what consultation was undertaken by the local authority prior to closure or redesign of day centre services. In those areas where closures have taken place, 59% of respondents indicated that the local authority did undertake consultation (for at least one centre). Of those giving detail on the consultation, the procedures were widely perceived to be inadequate either because the consultation period was too short, responses were ignored and/or insufficient attention was given to what people would do in the absence of the day centre.

"Council has cut all older peoples day centres. Gave the least amount of consultation as they could get away with, no consideration was given to what the older people would do when the day centres closed."

"Minimal consultation, very short periods (one month and three weeks) and views of users and carers not really acknowledged."

"Very little [consultation] as to where citizens could attend when centres closed. Little or no consideration to allocated days already in place at present day centre."

"At times service users were interviewed in their own houses by 'advocates'. They did not realise that these interviews would have an effect on future services."

"Consultation was done in a basic fashion only to tick necessary 'boxes' but was not meaningful. Jargon was frequently used that confused users and interested parties. Equality Impact assessment was basic when and if it happened."

"We were consulted, however questions asked/options were designed in such a way that retaining current services was not an option. Also some vital questions were not asked. When asking about engaging in the community the 'wish list' did not take into account the cuts in the third sector funding and cuts to peoples benefits. Therefore if a person said they would 'like to be able to use a taxi or use the local leisure activity centre' the jobs and funding to do so has in reality been removed. Some questionnaires were difficult to get hold of. We as staff felt that a lot of our concerns were not taken into account with the proposed redesign when feeding into the consultation."

"Lip Service 'consultations' in which objections were minimised by Senior Managers with spurious justifications raised, masking purely financial reasons. No account was taken re: social care research which indicated use of good day care provision can reduce the risk of admission to residential care long term."

REDEPLOYMENT AND REDUNDANCY

Just over half of respondents (55%) noted changes to staff terms and conditions, with over two-thirds of those (70%) noting changes in the number of staff.

"Up to Sept 2007 the service had 20 staff. Cuts then reduced the team to 7 FTE posts. Further cuts in April 2011 reduced the team to 4 FTE posts."

"One in-house day service for learning disability service users is not replacing staff that have left, reduced staff team by at least 30% in the last 18 months."

"We were a staff team of 12 and are now with 7."

Respondents reported that staff roles were increasingly being undertaken by volunteers or by lower-paid support workers, or that they were just managing with fewer staff: *"As day services do not have to be registered there has been pressure not to worry about customer to staff ratios."*

Some people reported compulsory **redundancies**. More common were examples of **redeployment**, with half of respondents indicating that alternative employment was made available to staff. However the redeployment on offer was not necessarily felt to be adequate:

"Some staff had to be redeployed to posts or locations they were not suitable because of travel or caring responsibilities. Some staff were offered downgraded positions or less hours."

"Many redep's had to accept significantly lower wages as our authority only pay protects to two scales. Many staff had to redep' to part time roles from full time."

In many cases **terms and conditions** have changed:

"Disestablishment of posts, reduction in pay, more responsibility for same salary, loss of 2 days pay pa, reduction in travel allowance, alteration to sick leave also affecting pay increment."

"Our salary was linked to NJC rates. Our employers have brought in their own performance related pay scheme that have meant (for some employees) an effective pay cut."

"Relief contracts were ended, lower mileage payments, higher pension contributions."

"Current draft plan is to completely rip up T & C's: to take 1 day leave & 1 'Borough' day (at Xmas) from staff. To make staff work a further 1 hr p/week. To hugely limit overtime and all other allowances. This much we know so far..."

Two-thirds (65%) reported that there have been **changes to the roles that staff perform**. Common themes were that staff were expected to undertake generic rather than specialised roles and to spend time working one-to-one with service users on support planning.

"Pilot project underway...Job descriptions completely different - from care assistants, day centre officers etc to bridge builders, team leader instead of managers, community support workers. Alongside this will run a 'resource centre' more in a traditional model of care staff."

"All job descriptions to change, with more responsibilities being held at lower levels."

"Different structure, more IT based, and working individually with service users to design their package.."

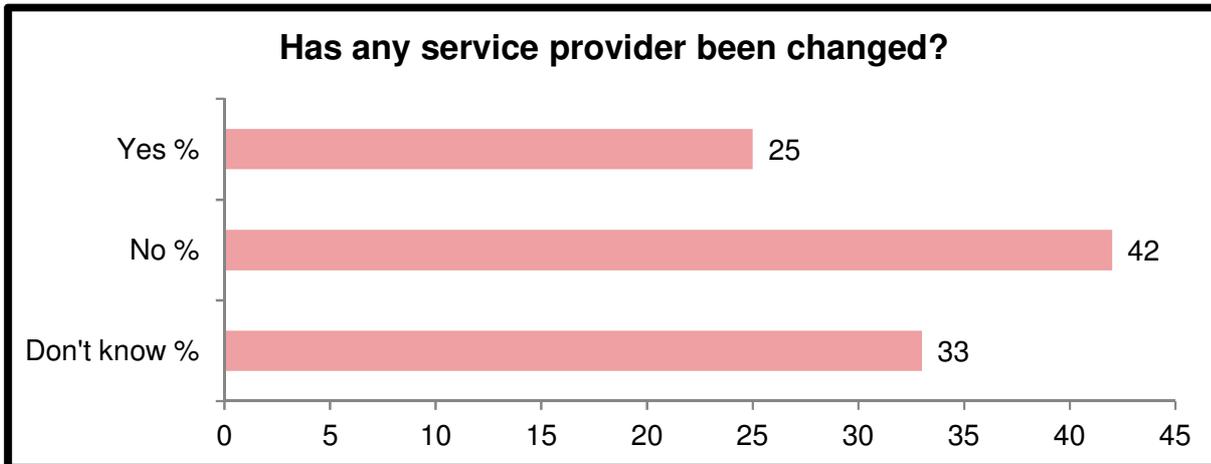
"Staff have been asked to provide a more personalised service, using individual service plans, working more one to one with individuals and supporting them into the community."

"Staff changing from building based to community based workers, possibly including home care."

There were concerns that this might include working in areas where staff had no experience or skills (*"such as the elderly, gardening etc"*). Staff also indicated that they were being asked to undertake additional responsibilities without additional pay. For example:

"A few years ago we were changed from General duties assistants grade 5, to Community access workers, grade 4. In doing this they froze our wages so in effect long term staff lost approx a thousand pound a year. We weren't meant to have as many responsibilities yet we have more... On a grade 5 we were rarely responsible for medication, reviews etc but since being downgraded to a 4 we now have those responsibilities. We were told that we'd rarely do any driving of mini buses on grade 4 yet again we are driving even more."

Respondents were asked if new providers were being brought in to run day centre services. Generally, awareness of whether service providers has changed was low. Whilst 25% have seen a provider change, and 42% have not, a sizeable 33% are unsure.



One of the government's proposals for reforming social care and other public services is for **staff-owned mutuals** to take over the running of services. In the survey, a couple of respondents raised this issue, but in both cases it was an idea which had not got very far.

"Possibility of outsourcing but no-one to take them over (for example, Age Concern not interested, as contracting too complicated). Attempts to promote mutuals/coops fallen on deaf ears, too."

"Managers to set up social enterprises so the council can hand over the day service (managers have not taken this up), write customer contracts, care plans and procedures in preparation of the services being handed over to the new outside provider."

PERSONAL BUDGETS

Respondents were asked about the impact of personal budgets on day centre provision. It was clear that many people saw a close link between the expansion of personal budgets and the reduction in day centre facilities:

"Council say self-directed support clients are not choosing to attend day centres as they want to do other things."

"There is generally a thought that service users could reconsider how day care is provided by using the money in their budgets to provide what they want."

"Some older people and people with learning disabilities are choosing to create a package of support that doesn't involve day services."

"This £30 [daily budget] can also be used by service users to access community resources and has been used to provide carers to enable someone to get out of the house."

Some respondents were optimistic about the scope for user choice that personal budgets could provide:

"More support for family carers, looks at the whole life of the customer, not just day service needs."

However many respondents expressed concerns about the ways in which the move to personal budgets was contributing to a reduction in the quality and scope of services. **Concerns included:**

- **Personal budgets that are too small to cover care needs**

"Budgets for personal use were reduced or did not cover anything like previous provision as the alternative services are more expensive to purchase. Brokering was limited. A significant amount of users were left with no service at all."

"Peoples budgets are not as big as they thought and once basic care needs are met there is often not alot left for what I would class as social care. The result is more people pulling out of services and becoming more isolated. They are also becoming more reliant on the few carers they see to provide a complete service in a few hours."

"People who have now been assessed for a personal budget can come out with less money for day services so may not be able to afford amount of previous day opportunities, also people will take their budget and buy individual services."

"PBs do not cover the cost of a full day's attendance for many, and this fragments provision and makes it more difficult to cater for."

- **Inadequate choice for people with personal budgets**

"those on personal budgets [are] struggling to find activities."

"[We] started to provide group activities within day service that could be 'bought' by those on individual budgets, and supported by PAs. Now this has been closed. No one can buy individual sessions anymore."

- **Insufficient funding for building-based services**

"it remains unclear as to who will fund the rent to these community centres."

"Trips have had to be axed, we don't have personal budgets to give birthday presents, biscuits in the morning as some people attending won't have had a breakfast or a hot drink or drink before attending."

There was a recurrent perception among some respondents that personal budgets and the broader personalisation agenda were being used by local authorities as an excuse to cut day centre services:

"It has given management the excuse to close Day Centres despite the fact that the number of service users wanting to use them has not dropped."

"County Council say with personal budgets comes choice so service users need a variety of options. Smokescreen for cuts and closures in our view."

"PBs provides the overall ideological cover for reduction in services as in-house painted as unresponsive to needs, though no evidence for this as was uncovered during local campaigns."

CONCLUSIONS

The survey gives a picture of how some day centre services are changing at a time of unprecedented financial cuts and a shift to personalised social care services. The survey does not constitute a representative sample of day centre workers, and there is a danger that dissatisfied workers may be more likely to complete such a survey, leading to a distorted account of change. However the data presented here complements and updates existing quantitative and qualitative data in confirming the lack of attention to provision of collective spaces within personalised social care services (see for example Mencap's report, *Stuck at Home* (Mencap, 2012)).

A number of changes reported in the survey are particularly worrying:

Failure to make provision for building-based services in an era of disaggregated budgets, leading to a real possibility that shared spaces will disappear. Local authorities are promising to replace day centres with new forms of provision ('community hubs'). However there is a danger that in the current financial context existing collective provision will close without adequate investment in alternatives. In this scenario, care provision will be individualistic, placing new demands on service users to manage their own care.

Substantial increases to charges for day centre attendance, transportation and meals.

Setting personal budgets so low that people are priced out of using day centres altogether or have to reduce the number of days that they attend.

Pricing services so that self-funders cannot afford to use them. The likely impact of such changes on older people, forty per cent of whom are estimated to make some financial contribution to their care costs, may be profound (Forder, 2007). It is likely to vary significantly by area: for example, Sutton estimates that one third of its day centre users are self-funders (London Borough of Sutton, 2010), whereas in other local authorities usage by self-funders is very low.

Restricting the range of activities which are undertaken at day centres, such as trips, birthday celebrations and craft activities.

Prohibiting people in residential homes from using day centres, because of a sense that otherwise the local authority is 'paying twice' for these people. The Social Care Institute for Excellence has warned that people in residential homes must not be excluded from the personalisation agenda (SCIE, 2009).

Failing to secure satisfactory terms and conditions for staff so that service users can have access to high quality provision delivered by valued and well-trained staff.

The commitment to choice and control within the personalisation agenda is absolutely right: no one should be made to attend a day centre if that is not what they want to do. However, choice may be taken away from service users if a valued day centre is closed. The forms of empowerment that personalisation advocates campaign for require collective spaces in which people can share concerns and articulate forms of personalisation based on inclusion and empowerment rather than isolation and risk-transfer.

Alongside choice and control, the personalisation agenda involves a commitment to prevention and enhanced social capital (Putting People First, 2007). These too may be undermined by day centre closure. People with low needs, who pay to use day centres, are likely to see their access reduced and may move more quickly to a higher level of need, putting greater pressure on statutory services. Social capital may be weakened if people lose collective spaces and spend more time at home. People from closed day centres may find their only alternative to more time at home is to spend hours on a minibus travelling to a large centre far from their home, weakening links to local communities.

Some high profile campaigns against day centre closures have made local headlines. There is a need to continue to build a national picture of what is happening to day centre provision, and what issues staff and service users are experiencing in their localities. There is also a need to share examples of where positive alternatives and service improvements are emerging.

Finally, there needs to be effective action to address the funding crisis in social care. The changes reported here reflect a context in which short-term austerity cuts are destabilising a system already facing a long-term crisis. The Dilnot Commission (2011) described social care funding as 'hard to understand, often unfair and unsustainable' and called for urgent action. Personalisation cannot be an agenda for empowerment and inclusion without a funding settlement that preserves both private dignity and public spaces.

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