



## Better Together VCS Policy Forum

### [Opening the door on the Connector Model](#)

A VCS led forum involving VCS organisations and public sector partners held online on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021

#### **Introduction**

The Forum was chaired by Jo Laverick, Executive Director of [Durham Community Action](#) and the VCS representative on the [County Durham Partnership](#) Board. Jo also chairs the bi-monthly meetings of the [Better Together VCS Forum](#).

Twenty-nine people attended the Forum from a cross section of voluntary sector organisations and public sector partners.

Jo provided some context setting: The Forum was an opportunity for voluntary sector leaders to meet with commissioners to hear some of the key asks from the public sector, as well as show case examples of current work which is supporting vulnerable people in our communities and which adds value to the range of NHS and Local Authority care and support services. The aim was to explore connections and ways of working which can help the sector to engage effectively. Also, to identify what we need to be in place to make relationships between commissioning and operational delivery of community support more responsive and targeted to where it is needed most.

#### **Developing the Connector Model [link to presentation](#)**

#### **Jo Laverick, DCA, and Sarah Burns, Head of Integrated Commissioning, NHS & DCC**

The Connector Model is a term which has been coined to describe a system which will align VCS providers more closely with commissioning.

Sarah outlined the County Durham Care Partnership governance structure and the move towards the Integrated Care System (ICS) where the focus will be on primacy of place and working at a local level to improve health outcomes. She recognises the strength of the VCS in County Durham and the need to invest in prevention and building resilience in communities to target lower levels of health complexity to stop greater needs arising. It has been hard for the NHS to navigate their way around the VCS – the Connector Model is a way to engage with the VCS as a two-way process and help identify gaps in services. A VCS Development Fund has been set up to enable the VCS to contribute to more health and/or care pathways and helping to deliver services.

*There are three current asks of the sector to assist with:*

- *Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) – getting key messages out to communities*

- *Engagement with Children and Young People that use outpatient service*
- *Support on discharge*

*Are there things that the VCS can do to help?*

A final slide outlined some of the structures/people in place to enable this.

Contact Information

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**Commissioning Health & Wellbeing** [link to presentation](#)

**Jon Quine - Commissioning Manager, County Durham Integrated Commissioning Team**

Jon outlined the County Durham Commissioning and Delivery plan 2020-2025 for Health and Social Care which brings together both NHS and DCC Commissioners and providers. This is work in progress with plans to widen the scope and truly engage communities working towards a co-produced plan. The plan is to be accessible later this year via the County Durham Partnership website and will have the ability for the VCS and public to provide feedback and engage with individual chapter leads.

*The ask of the VCS is to:*

- *Be a vehicle for the engagement required as we move towards co-production*
- *Seek out the chapters that are relevant to you, your services, and your communities*
- *Provide feedback on the content of the chapter*
- *Offer yourself as a resource for chapter leads to engage with as we work towards co-production*
- *Circulate within your networks*
- *Engage, challenge, support, participate, advocate*

Contact Information

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**A Sector Perspective** – Three models of community support

Sector perspectives provide illustrations from the VCS about how services are working operationally, including insights into challenges and opportunities.

**Hospital Discharge**

**Robyn Holmes, Chief Executive, Age UK County Durham**

Robyn gave an overview of [Age UK County Durham](#)'s experiences over the last eighteen months and plans to develop a Hospital Discharge Service.

She highlighted the need for cohesive joint working between all organisations so that patients/clients have a planned, safe, timely and dignified process of discharge and receive quality care. The importance of involving family and carers in the process to understand the wider need of patients/clients will, if done well, lead to fewer re-admissions to hospital.

There are a number of VCS organisations providing wrap around or direct support for patients on discharge e.g. access to advice, food and fuel, and transport. Collaboration between services and organisations can be ad hoc, so there's an opportunity to build more structured collaboration to enable a more rounded support offer.

**Volunteer Bank/Mutual Aid** [link to presentation](#)

**Abby Thompson, Volunteering Development Manager, Durham Community Action**

Abby gave an overview of the 108 Mutual Aid groups which evolved in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic to support the most vulnerable in the community. An [Interactive Map](#) shows the location of these and the current status of the groups, some of which are continuing to support local communities.

Abby also highlighted the development of a volunteer bank to support the roll out of the Vaccination Programme and LFD testing centres.

Considerable research has been undertaken into the nature of volunteering during this period, but it is too early to predict how volunteering will be impacted for the future.

**Family Action – Bridge Young Carers Service** [link to presentation](#)

**Emma Crawford-Moore - Operational Manager – Durham and Stockton**

Emma gave an overview of Family Action's [Bridge Young Carers Service](#) supporting young people from 5-18 years of age, helping to strengthen families and communities, building skills and resilience, and improving outcomes. The young carers Neighbourhood Charter seeks to change policies and practices in organisations including health services and schools.

Young carers are involved in co-production and development giving them a voice and enabling the service to be responsive to emerging needs. The Stockton One Team Approach provides an example of collaborative place-based activity which is value for money, demonstrating how it can work in practice.

**Facilitated Discussion**

Participants were encouraged to consider the questions – What / where do you think the VCS can most usefully contribute to health & social care? Are there practical aspects of your work you would like to talk about with partners/commissioners?

In the ensuing discussion the following key points were made:

- NHS needs engagement from and with the VCS – an equal place round the table to help write the plan – keeping the conversation going, constant reviewing. VCS 'paw prints' need to be seen throughout the plan.
- Cross over of system players: Link workers; carers; volunteers
- Practical issues are critical to success – designing a practical service that meets the needs of everyone.
- The urgent often gets in the way of the important – need to invest time in planning so that a lot of time can be saved by avoiding crisis.
- Important to identify and learn the lessons from the crisis response to Covid pandemic and to plan, through co-production, for stronger preventive care systems in communities.
- Consider what needs doing Now – Soon – Later
- Members of the Better Together Forum valued the opportunity to be involved in the planning process and felt optimistic.

## **Next Steps**

- Circulation of this report to members of the Better Together Forum and Public Sector participants
- Members encouraged to share this with networks and any specialist organisations who may have an interest with this work
- Members encouraged to contact Jon Quine [jon.quine1@nhs.net](mailto:jon.quine1@nhs.net) to get involved now in influencing strands of the Commissioning and Delivery plan
- DCA to organise a series of structured and focussed conversations over the next 3-4 months to continue the conversations. A programme of activity to be drafted and consulted upon during November, and circulated to interested partners and relevant networks.