



Better Together VCS Policy Forum

Mental Health

Report on a VCS led forum involving VCS organisations, public sector partners and commissioners held on Friday 6th July 2018

The Forum was convened to look at how the public sector and the VCS are responding to mental health needs in the County, particularly through partnership approaches, how support is commissioned and what potential there is for services to be more aligned and responsive.

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

Partnership Perspectives on Mental Health – [link to presentation](#)

Denise Elliott, Interim Head of Commissioning, gave an overview on key mental health statistics and outlined the governance and partnership arrangements for mental health in County Durham. She shared the mental health and wellbeing strategic plan and highlighted priorities. Information on the prevention at scale programme was given with the aim of reducing death by suicide and focussing on workforce, young people, and anti-stigma and discrimination. Further information on mental health promotion, prevention and the wellbeing model was outlined. Aspects of commissioning for mental health provision were given and a reminder that the Mental Health Provider and Stakeholder forum continues to be a mechanism for engagement, networking and partnership working plus wider engagement through the Mental Health Strategic Partnership Board.

Services to Support Mental Health – [link to presentation](#)

Patrick Scott, Director of Operations, Durham and Darlington and Dr Suresh Babu, Clinical Director Adult Mental Health Services for Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation trust gave a presentation outlining the services offered by TEWV under the four directorates of Adult Mental Health; Mental Health Services for Older people; Children and Young people's Services; and Learning Disability Services. They highlighted the challenges faced in managing demand on services and improving access and outlined some of their priorities including transforming care, and reviewing and redesigning crisis services.

Case Studies: Opportunities and Challenges in Community Based Services

- [link to presentation](#)

Carol Gaskarth, CEO [Pioneering Care Partnership](#), gave a VCS Provider perspective on mental health support services. She outlined a number of projects (Wellbeing for Life; Community Gardening; Work Place Health; Buddies Befriending) all of which contribute significantly to helping people cope, connect and make positive contributions. She highlighted some of the challenges such as navigating the system, unnecessary competition, the number of clients and funding, as well as acknowledging that partnership working can be tough. However opportunities exist such as the model developed by Advice in County Durham; developing a social prescribing network; Community venues being more connected and joined up; harnessing passionate people and volunteers including the range of navigators, link workers, connectors and advisers.

Ali Lee, Deputy Manager of the [Waddington Street Centre](#) (WSC), spoke about the challenges and opportunities of mental health and the voluntary sector. WSC work predominantly with Adults and provide a mental health resource centre. Some of the challenges include an increase in discharge from statutory services, access to crisis services, stigma and discrimination, an increase in Borderline Personality Disorder, lack of parity of esteem with physical health, and the effects of welfare reform. WSC have sought to address some of these challenges by offering a referral pathway for GPs; working more closely with Community Mental Health teams, the Crisis team, Welfare Rights, Job Centre Plus, and Samaritans. Finally Ali highlighted some of the positives of the Voluntary Sector such as sharing the load with statutory services and having more time; limited resources enables thinking more creatively; focussed on people not profit; and being a voice for those whose voice is seldom heard.

Roundtable Discussion

Participants were asked to consider three questions, the key messages are summarised below:

1. How can we ensure that Children and young people have the optimum wellbeing – What would a successful outcome be by 2025?

- 'Live well with mental health' - Young mental health champions within our communities.
- Support right from birth – work in schools to promote 'wellbeing', emotional intelligence and all aspects of mental health - talking about mental health should be normal.
- Change in the education system – too much focus on academic achievement puts huge pressures on young people.
- More support for young carers – often have their own needs and caring responsibilities – Peer support activities and respite.
- More focus on groups for young people to move the emphasis from social media to actually being around people and developing 'real' social skills.

- Investment in VCS over longer period of time to provide early intervention and better services in the community to help reduce number of CAMHS referrals and YP accessing Crisis services.

2. Thinking about what is available in the County to support Mental Health in all age groups, what additional resources and skills are needed?

- All work places should have MH First Aid like all work places need physical first aid provision
- Improve understanding about mental health and what mental health services can achieve and help combat stigma.
- Better triage and low level support to prevent people deteriorating. Time span of formal support too short and ending too abruptly with nothing to go on to.
- Investment in VCS to provide more community based services e.g. Crisis support for those who don't meet current criteria for crisis support; face to face listening services and telephone support; Safe/quiet places for people to have time to regain calm & equilibrium; arts based activity; improving peer to peer support etc.
- Link with community organisations, churches etc. – share resources – collaboration and coordinated approach.
- Further training /awareness in mental health for VCS generally to help make appropriate referrals – definite need for support to Job Centre Plus/DWP to help recognise and respond appropriately to those with MH needs.

3. What is positive about existing cross sector working relationships and what further opportunities are there to develop these?

- Opportunities such as this Forum to meet others and make better connections.
- 'Advice in County Durham' network has positive links with specialist VCS Mental Health providers but needs better links with statutory MH Services.
- More holistic approach to help people access MH support.
- 'Navigator' type roles are an opportunity to improve connections.

Key messages from the VCS for Commissioners

- Commissioning can be a mystery to some. Better systems for both to come together – this sort of event is really helpful – help us to understand the constraints of Commissioners and come and find out more about the VCS.
- Develop a joint public sector policy for investment in community based services including joint commissioning. All Commissioners need to look at what is funded across all sectors – make connections in contracts to add value – sometimes contracts conflict/are in competition.
- Longer term funding for projects will allow VCS to come together to share resources and work more creatively. Grant Funding as well as Commissioned Services. Encourage flexibility.
- Consider the size of contracts - It's very difficult for larger VCS orgs to sub-contract with current contracts due to risk, but the loss is that small local expertise is lost.
- Make collaboration between VCS organisations a pre-requisite of a contract this will strengthen the VCS.

Key messages from Commissioners for the VCS

- Encouragement to the VCS to look at what is out there already and understand what the statutory sector constraints are – we need to work together to understand each other's needs.
- Help us to understand how we make opportunities available to the VCS.
- Broker and support VCS provider engagement and representation into the Providers Alliance which is to be established.
- It is our desire to increase grant funding and to keep Commissioning local organisations.
- Be proactive and look for alternative sources of funding rather than relying on public sector funding - there is funding out there.

Next Steps

- This summary paper to be circulated with a cover note to key cross sector partnerships in the County, in particular: County Durham Partnership Board, Prevention Steering Group, Integration Board and Area Action Partnerships.
- The paper will also be circulated via VCS led partnerships: Advice in County Durham, Volunteer Coordinators' Forum, and Share and Learn Network. All partners are invited to share the report with members of their own local or professional networks.
- Through the Better Together Forum we will consult on, and consider options to ensure a strong and consistent voice on behalf of VCS providers of health services into the emerging Provider Alliance, as part of the governance model for Integrated Health and Social Care.
- We will consult within VCS provider networks about options for a model for quality assurance, which provides both bench marking for providers' services, and also helps build their capacity and resilience.
- We will consult further with VCS providers about support and training needs for front line staff and volunteers.

The Better Together Forum brings together senior representatives of larger or specialist VCS organisations with a countywide remit to share best practice and look for new opportunities to collaborate.

Contacts:

Jo Laverick (Chair) Joanna.Laverick@durhamcommunityaction.org.uk Tel: 01388 742041

Secretariat provided by the Council's Partnerships Team - Ian Hunter Smart

ian.huntersmart@durham.gov.uk Tel: 03000 263 595

For further information click [here](#) or see www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk