

Spotlight

Cost of Living Crisis

Featuring:

Edberts House
Citizens Advice Gateshead and Citizens Advice Newcastle

Pages 4 and 8

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An Interview with Jo Curry from Sir James Knott Trust

Cover photo: people pack emergency supplies into boxes at Edberts House



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About this magazine

Connected Voice is published four times a year. We aim to make sure all information is correct and up to date but we do not accept liability for any mistakes that may inadvertently appear. Views and opinions in this magazine are not necessarily those of Connected Voice.

Images: as part of our commitment to accessibility, we describe images for those using screen readers.

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Issue 12: Cost of Living Crisis

At the time of writing news of the energy price rises from 1 October have been announced - an 80% increase on current rates. Added to the increasing costs of food, fuel, other household essentials and rising inflation, we're facing a perfect winter storm - 'the cost of living crisis'.

In this issue we meet with three local organisations, Edberts House, Citizens Advice Gateshead and Citizens Advice Newcastle to hear about the essential advice, support and services they provide to their local communities.

We also learn from the North East England Chamber of Commerce how issues around the cost of living are more broadly affecting businesses and families, and what

actions they are taking to address poverty.

There's updates from the Connected Voice Haref and Advocacy teams about how they are supporting people, communities and organisations, and we also hear from our Commercial Development Executive, Sally Adams, about why now is the best time to be thinking about how you can make a profit to fund your charitable work.

Our Chief Executive, Lisa Goodwin, reflects on our work in managing the VCSE Cost of Living Crisis Fund.

Lastly, Jo Curry at Sir James Knott Trust shares their funding priorities in these turbulent times, and offers helpful advice around how to ensure finances are in order when applying for grant funding ●

Cost of Living Crisis

Lisa Goodwin
Chief Executive



The cost of living crisis is affecting us as organisations as much as it affects the people we support

Looking back at the past few editions of this magazine a common theme emerges. We have continually been looking at the crises that surround us, and how the voluntary and community sector is responding. Whether its COVID-19, the climate crisis, or the struggle to keep people included and involved as the world becomes ever more digital we have stepped up as a sector and done what we can to support people.

The cost of living crisis is the focus of this edition, and we hear from some key organisations in our patch of Gateshead and Newcastle who provide valuable support around this theme. I feel very proud of the way our sector continually responds and is there for people when times are tough. But the expectation we will always do this is now a problem. Focusing on work other than your core purpose as a

charity is becoming more and more common across the sector, and is something we are familiar with here at Connected Voice - you can read more about this in my piece on page 14 - 'Stepping outside of our role to respond to the cost of living crisis'.

The cost of living crisis is affecting us as organisations just as much as it affects the people we support. We need to be able to withstand huge cost pressures to make sure we are still here to provide our vital services in the future. In order to do that we must see extra support coming to us from national government. I'm hoping by the time this lands in your inbox we will have some detail about what that support might be.

If you are struggling with your organisation's finances, please don't hesitate to contact us to see if we can help ●

Spotlight: Edberts House

Sarah Gorman
Chief Executive



Edberts House connects people to each other

Our story began over 10 years ago with a small group of local people in East Gateshead wanting to see change on their estate. 10 years later we were described by the national personalised care lead for NHSE as demonstrating national leadership through our work.

edbertshouse.org

What does your organisation do?

How we connect to others and to our local community has a profound impact on our health and wellbeing. Research has proved this. That's why, at Edberts House, we are all about connectivity: connecting people to each other, to good support around them, and to decision makers, so that policy and services can change to benefit everybody.

We began in 2009 with one community house – Edberts House – in East Gateshead. Creating a steering group of local people, we developed a whole range of fun activities, run by our staff team and volunteers. Lunch groups, accredited courses, trips, pantomimes, art projects: anything that local people wanted to try out! Over the next 6 years, we saw antisocial behaviour levels on our estate fall from the highest in the borough to one of the lowest, and house void levels fall until there was a waiting list to move into the area.

Tell us about your key projects?

Over the past 13 years we

have launched a further three community houses across Gateshead: although they share the vision of connectivity, each has its own unique atmosphere and timetable, according to the aspirations of local people. Pattinson House, Larkspur House and – most recently – Highfield House are in the heart of their communities. People can drop in and spend time there – the kettle is always on – or participate in specific sessions of activity.

“Our Community Linking Project began when we discovered that 1 in 4 patients coming into the Felling GP Practice didn't have a clinical issue

Our Community Linking Project began when we discovered that 1 in 4 of the patients coming to the Felling GP practice didn't have a clinical issue. Maybe they had anxiety or low mood, but this was caused by social isolation, housing or debt problems, relationship issues or other wider causes. We

Photo: a large group of people, young and old, smile for a photo in front of Edberts House



Photo: a woman from Edberts House sits talking to a man - she is holding papers and documents in her hand.



employed a community worker to spend time with these patients, walking shoulder to shoulder to try and address their social issues.

The results are best summarised by one of our Felling GPs:

“I can’t speak highly enough of the positive impact the CLWs have had for our patients and our practice. The absence of any referral criteria means they will see anyone, about any issue. They will pick up on the things that are most important to the individual – often there are lots of these - and support them in a whatever way is needed... I’ve seen many examples where the CLW input has been pivotal for someone. As GPs we often see this change through a reduced number of contacts from that person with us and wider health services... It frees our time to see other people then too, so it really has a massive impact for the community.”

This project quickly spread from one practice, to four, and then to nine. We submitted some evidence of the work we had developed in Gateshead to the NHS, and it helped influence the roll out of social prescribing across England. We now support social prescribing across all GP surgeries in Gateshead, and work with the national and regional NHSE Social Prescribing Teams.

66 I feel on the road to recovery and literally that you have saved my life

“I feel on the road to recovery and literally that you have saved my life, as eventually burying my head in the sand any longer would have led to my premature death. I feel supported and cared

for and that I am not on my own and isolated. I am sure that this will lead to me increasing my self-esteem, and this will lead to positive things happening in my life and a better quality of life.”
Community Linking Project patient

Through our social prescribing, we discovered how difficult it was for local people to get the help they needed – one family, we discovered, had 63 different professionals working with them over a 12-month period!!

This was the start of Larkspur House – home of the Thrive in Beacon Lough East (TiBLE) project. TiBLE is built around a place based multi-agency team and includes our own Council Early Help and Social Worker, with residents involved in their recruitment, as well as a Police Community Support Officer, counsellors, Citizens Advice worker, community, and youth workers. Building relationships through fun activities means that we can offer support at the earliest possible opportunity, and benefit from a wide range of expertise based on our doorstep. This year we have a funded embedded researcher working alongside us to help to evaluate the impact of the project, which is exciting!

Most recently, we have launched our Health Equity team. There will be a focussed team to support children and families at the earliest opportunity, using a trauma informed approach, and a team to develop place based approaches alongside primary care. Inequalities are stark in Gateshead – over 10-year difference in life expectancy depending on where you are born, and many people choosing between heating and eating. This is not acceptable, and we want to do all we can to create more and more opportunities for people to be connected – a happier, healthier, friendlier Gateshead! ●

Supporting Communities During the Cost of Living Crisis

Vicki Harris
Haref Coordinator



Vicki shares how Connected Voice Haref is supporting communities and organisations this Autumn

The impact of rising costs is being felt by people and organisations across the country. But, unsurprisingly, it is the most marginalised people in society who are being left to suffer some of the worst consequences.

Those on lower incomes and on benefits, along with people who face more hurdles to access services and those managing health conditions will be impacted more heavily. We already know that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected ethnically minoritised people and communities, leading to loss of income and jobs and a long term impact on people's health, stress and anxiety. We can see that rising living costs will have a disproportionate impact on our ethnically minoritised communities too.

Supporting communities around health and wellbeing

Our [Haref Network](#) is made up of organisations and groups that directly support many diverse communities in Newcastle and Gateshead. Alongside this, our [Haref Allies](#) are representatives from health organisations who want to improve their services and support our local ethnically minoritised communities. We are working with our Haref Allies to develop effective health information sessions for our Haref Network, particularly around mental health, how to stay well, and better information on how to use health services. Our aim is that the Haref Network members will then be able to provide people with relevant health information and advice, and signpost them to the right help and

support. Keeping people well will be even more important over the coming winter months and during the current cost of living crisis.

Supporting organisations around funding and governance

Many of the organisations in our Haref Network are concerned about funding, resources, increased demand for their services and the sustainability of their projects. We are therefore providing organisational support so they can continue to do the fantastic work they already do in their communities. We know that many Haref Network organisations are looking to build their capacity for fundraising, in particular bid-writing. Staff from the Connected Voice Support and Development Team will be at the next Haref Network meeting on 11 October, with a presentation and opportunities for questions.

They'll be covering:

- The importance of having a clear focus on outcomes (the why and not just the what) in funding bids
- Having strong governance (how you run your organisation) and robust policies and good practice (for example in Safeguarding)
- How to identify a broader range of funders and develop a clear funding strategy
- Using the funding resources available from Support and Development
- They will also highlight the different ways in which the Support and Development team can guide you to build your capacity for greater fundraising success.

Cost of Living and Our Local Economy

Marianne O’Sullivan highlights the challenges faced by businesses and communities across the North East and how the North East England Chamber of Commerce is campaigning for change and promoting employer best practice



North East England
Chamber of Commerce

The North East England Chamber of Commerce supports businesses to grow their knowledge and connect with others regionally and nationally

www.neechamber.co.uk

There have been two large shocks to the global economy—the pandemic and the Ukraine war. We are now facing a rising cost of living and an increased cost of doing business. Inflation, energy prices and staff costs are all key concerns for businesses in the North East. Employees are also facing rising fuel, food and energy costs. In our last Quarterly Economic Survey the top three business concerns were inflation, energy prices and staff costs which continues an upwards trend from last quarter and over the last six months.

“ In our last Quarterly Economic Survey the top three business concerns were inflation, energy prices and staff costs

With firms struggling to recruit, many are considering ways to retain their staff, looking at pay, progression and training for existing staff. Wellbeing is also a key part in retention, financial wellbeing of staff is especially important with the cost of living crisis. According to the Money and Pensions Service, 4.2 million worker days each year are lost in absences because of a lack of financial wellbeing. That’s the equivalent of £626 million in lost output.

At the Chamber we are working to highlight best practice for employers through our Good Work toolkit. This includes Hodgson Sayers, who became the first company in the construction sector in the North East to become accredited by the Living Wage Foundation and Northumbrian Water who have started offering financial wellness sessions and support as part of a wider wellbeing strategy for employees.

The Chamber have also been campaigning to Government on behalf of our members to reduce child poverty and tackle deprivation in the region. The North East Child Poverty Commission has released alarming figures showing that overall child poverty rates in the North East have risen by almost half, from 26% to 38% in six years.

If we’re to address challenges for businesses such as the skills gap and long-term health problems in the region, we need to tackle this issue. We need to see the levelling up agenda used to ensure children in the North East are able to access the same opportunities as others.

There needs to be urgent action to tackle the cost of living crisis and protect households from the pressures of inflation, energy costs and basics like food. It must be a priority for our new Prime Minister to tackle inequality in the region ●

Spotlight: Citizens Advice Services in Newcastle and Gateshead

Judith Wood Archer
Citizens Advice
Gateshead
Tracy Armstrong
Citizens Advice
Newcastle

In this spotlight, we catch up with Citizens Advice Gateshead and Citizens Advice Newcastle to find out what support they are offering to local people in Gateshead and Newcastle, their recent projects and how they are responding to the Cost of Living Crisis.

What does your organisation do?

Established in 1957, **Citizens Advice Gateshead** provides free, independent and impartial advice, information and guidance to the people of Gateshead. Everyone deserves free access to advice and information when they need it, but like so many areas in the North East, Gateshead has increasingly high levels of poverty and social need that make our work, and that of our partners, vital.

Citizens Advice Newcastle has existed since 1939 to help those people who are most vulnerable navigate complex issues and campaign for change. We strive for a society free from poverty, injustice and inequality. We are a charity and a voluntary organisation that relies on grants from funders.

We provide local services to local people and we make a difference to people's pockets through our benefits and financial capability work. We are a voice for local people and we support other community organisation in the work they do.

Our advice is free, independent, confidential and impartial to everyone. Newcastle is the poorest City in the North East with 38% of children in relative poverty.

Tell us about your key projects?

Citizens Advice Gateshead: This year we have focused on bringing our advice services out into the Gateshead communities, putting our advisers into local venues so that the help you need is on your doorstep. This allows people to be seen by a familiar face and linked into our other services like debt advice, housing or help making a Universal Credit claim for the first time.

You can still pop into our building in central Gateshead too, or ring us on local adviceline 0808 278 7902.

Citizens Advice Newcastle: We continue to provide open door face-to-face services along with some telephone and digital work. We have recently set up an adviser attending the Walker Foodbank in partnership with the Trussell Trust.

“ We have seen an increase demand for our services across benefits, debt and energy

We have seen an increased demand for our services across benefits, debt and energy due to the cost of living crisis. We are campaigning with our local MP's and councillors and our policy asks are an 8-10 % benefit increase

Photo left: A smiling man sits in front of a computer wearing a headset at Citizens Advice Newcastle.

Photo right: Four staff from Citizens Advice Gateshead stand smiling at the camera, as one member of the team holds their partnership award from National Citizens Advice.



to keep pace with inflation, expanding energy efficiency measures, investment in affordable social housing and reducing the standing charge on meters.

How has Connected Voice supported you?

Citizens Advice Newcastle: We recently had a meeting with an adviser from the Support and Development team to look at different ways of fundraising.

Citizens Advice Gateshead and Connected Voice have recently worked with three other organisations and Gateshead Council on the Future You project. We helped over 1400 people move closer to work by linking up the great work of the organisations working in Gateshead to make it easier for local people to get the training and guidance they wanted.

What do people say about your organisation?

Citizens Advice Gateshead:

“In a time of crisis and uncertainty you became a beacon and huge support ... a lifeline in fact.”

“Excellent! Any problem big or small they will help you or point you in the right direction”

Citizens Advice Newcastle:

“Hello Guys what a lovely place only one in whole Newcastle upon Tyne and Wear that I really like and the customer services are amazing they always do their best to help God bless them all”

“The wonderful and understanding DAVE was so kind and helpful!!!! He was patient and competent, giving me 30 mins of his time to take my details and offer “very” helpful advice in a “lovely” friendly manner”

Contact information:

Citizens Advice Gateshead

Adviseline: 0808 278 7902

Email: advice@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk

Website: <https://citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk>

Citizens Advice Newcastle

Adviseline 08082s787823

Email citycab@newcastlecab.org.uk

Website: <https://citizensadvice-Newcastle.org.uk>

Profit with Purpose

Sally Adams
Commercial Development
Executive



A strong commercial strategy isn't just about financial stability – it directly impacts on the people and communities you support

Sally Adams reflects on her experiences in developing a new commercial strategy for Connected Voice and shares tips on what has made it successful, even in the face of a pandemic and period of economic downturn.

As I'm sure is the case with many people, I have a vivid memory of 23 March 2020. I sat in my kitchen as Boris Johnson informed the country we would be locking down in response to COVID-19. 23 March 2020 was also my first day working for Connected Voice. I joined Connected Voice to generate income through existing and new commercial opportunities and it felt like the timing couldn't be worse. However, two years on and we're flying. I couldn't be prouder of the work being carried out by our team and the positive impact it's having on organisations and communities. Now we face a new challenge; a cost of living crisis impacting every decision an organisation makes, including our own.

Many organisations will need to respond to increased overheads and reduced funding so now is a good time to explore new opportunities that generate income. This doesn't have to mean a drastic shift in your services and large investments of time and resources. In many cases, there's a great deal of value potential for organisations by simply doing

what they already do, but with a sharper commercial focus.

Taking the step to charge for some of your products and services might feel like a significant leap for your organisation. For this reason, it's important that your team are on board from the start and I've shared some tips around this below.

The word 'profit' in charities can make some people wince but there's an important distinction to make here between profit in charities and profit in private sector businesses – the profit you generate for your charity is invested back into delivering your charitable objectives. Through charging for some services and products, you not only diversify your income and make your projects more sustainable, you can also have a greater positive impact in the communities you support. This will be even more important as charities and community organisations face increased demand for services as a result of the cost of living crisis.

Commercial development should be:

- **Ethical.** It should not detract from your organisation's mission and values. In fact, it's a good idea to use your strengths and build on what makes your organisation unique, which is often reflected in your values. For example, at Connected Voice, we have used

“ There's a great deal of value potential in simply doing what you already do but with a sharper commercial focus

our experiences in embedding Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices to develop a bespoke training package that will help other organisations to improve their own EDI.

- **Practical.** Do you have the staffing resources to support this? Our teams at Connected Voice often have a busy workload so I check in with them regularly and adjust our targets if necessary.
- **Collaborative.** Has your team been consulted about your plans? Whether they are your 'feet on the ground' or focussed on the operational aspects of your organisation, they will be the key barometer for decisions and often have the greatest insight and ideas.
- **Needed.** Connected Voice only provides services when there is a clear need. If we feel there is

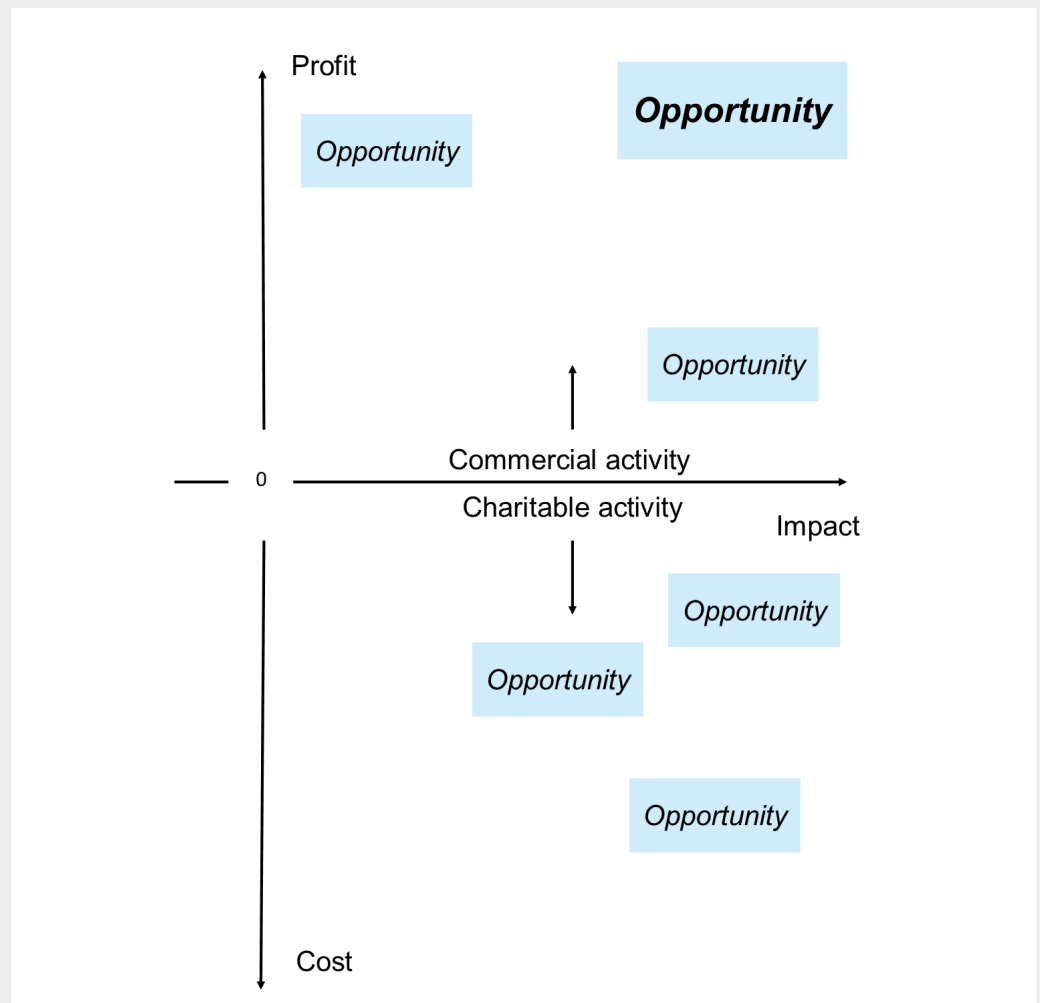
a cheaper or even free option for an organisation, we will recommend this.

A useful tool to use is a profit/impact matrix. This allows you to map your current or planned products according to not only their profitability, but also their impact in line with your organisation's mission.

Anything below the horizontal axis loses money, or breaks even, while anything above it makes a profit. Everything to the right of the vertical axis has a positive impact in line with your organisation's mission. Anything to the left of the vertical axis would detract from your mission, so we'll leave that out.

The sweet spot? The top right corner. Anything here is delivering the greatest impact and the greatest income ●

Image right: Profit impact matrix. Profit sits at the top of the y axis and cost at the bottom. The x axis draws a horizontal line in the middle with Impact sitting on the right side of the x axis. Commercial activities can be found above the x axis (with varying degrees of profit and impact) and charitable activities below it (with varying degrees of cost and impact)



On Your Side and Here to Help

Gill Edgar
Senior Advocate



Claire Rowntree
Senior Advocate



Senior Advocates, Gill and Claire, reflect on the difference that our services have made over a challenging few years and how we can support people in the current Cost of Living Crisis

The cost of living crisis comes after we are still feeling the effects of Austerity and Welfare Reform, and the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time we have also seen tremendous strain on services which are often running over capacity and on reduced resources, in turn placing increased pressure on staff and volunteers.

A report from Child Poverty Action Group in 2020 found that government policy has resulted in the lowest earners paying disproportionately for the Covid pandemic compared to high earners and large corporations. [Poverty in the pandemic: the impact of coronavirus on low-income families and children]. Real terms pay cuts have also impacted on already low paid workforces such as care staff, supermarket workers, delivery drivers etc who were regarded as 'essential' during the pandemic. The lowest paid are carrying the greatest burden, with rising dependence on food banks and heavy reliance on charitable and voluntary sector for the

'working' poor.

The burdens and worries caused by reduced income and resources can cause division in communities and views of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor can create significant tensions. This can lead to discriminatory behaviours, further marginalisation of minority groups and, ultimately, actions fuelled by prejudice and hate.

There is a wealth of evidence that Hate Crime increased during the Covid pandemic, particularly race-based hate. Our Hate Crime Advocacy service saw a 142% increase in referrals during the two-year period April 2020 to March 2022 in comparison to the previous two years, with a high proportion (approximately half) based on race. We are also involved in research exploring the concept of 'hate relationships' where people are victimised on multiple occasions by neighbours and people living in their communities. We are working with researchers at Durham and Northumbria Universities and other practitioners to develop a 'toolkit'

“ Our Hate Crime Advocacy Service saw a 142% increase in referrals from April 2020 to March 2022

“ A rights-based approach is what sets advocacy apart from other support agencies

for partner organisations to use in identifying and responding appropriately to Hate Crime.

Advocacy is essentially about information – we make sure that people have the information they need, in a format they can access so that they can decide for themselves what course of action they want to take. Advocates then support them to take that action and ensure they access the services they need. This is achieved, even when resources are in short supply, by asserting their rights as laid out in legislation. This rights-based approach is what sets advocacy apart from other support agencies.

Where we might not be able to provide support directly (for example we cannot offer benefit or debt advice), we can very often find an organisation that can help, due to our extensive knowledge of local services and resources. Signposting is a critical part of the advocate's role. It is especially important in the current perfect storm of financial challenges that

are currently affecting people across Newcastle and Gateshead.

With inflation in the UK at a record high [UK inflation rises to 9.1%, its highest rate in 40 years, The Guardian (22/6/22)], alongside rising fuel costs, the lack of access to social housing and the increasing costs of private rentals - up by 2.7% in the 12 months to April 2022 [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices UK April 2022, ONS (April 2022) - many people we work with simply do not have enough money coming into the home to survive. Our advocates have helped people appeal decisions and secure grants of over £130,000 in the last year, making a tangible difference to people's financial situations. Bringing our ability to see people holistically, our role in connecting people with services and support is often as important as the direct advocacy that we offer to ensure that people's voices are heard, and their needs and wishes taken into account in decisions made about them ●

Here's what some of the people who've recently had support from us have said:

“ I am so grateful for Connected Voice Advocacy! No other effective support was available to me when I needed it the most. Staff are highly trained and knowledgeable and most importantly listen and treat me with upmost respect

“ I have a brilliant advocate. I am able to talk to her and I feel listened to, heard, understood and accepted.

“ I am so grateful to have you with me, fighting my corner. I feel I am not alone.

To find out more about our services and to make a referral visit www.connectedvoice.org.uk/advocacy

Stepping Outside of Our Role to Respond to the Cost of Living Crisis

Lisa Goodwin
Chief Executive



Lisa reflects on how we, like many organisations, have had to change what we do in order to help support our communities

Connected Voice is working with the NHS to support smaller voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations with their increased running costs during the cost of living crisis. Some of you reading this may have already seen the information and applied to the fund. We have £285,000 to allocate in grants of between £2,000 - £4,000 to VCSE organisations with an income of under £600,000 per year, who are feeling the pressure of increased running costs due to high inflation, energy price increases, and other financial pressures.

Organisations who apply have to be doing work to improve the health and wellbeing of local people in Newcastle and/or Gateshead, must be based in Newcastle or Gateshead, and we are prioritising those organisations working in areas of higher deprivation. You can see all of the information related to this fund on our website, and please note the deadline for applications is 15 September.

www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/support-and-development/funding/vcse-cost-living-crisis-fund

This feels like increasingly familiar territory for us these days. During the peak of the COVID-19 crisis we found ourselves in the awkward position of funder, helping to distribute emergency grants, and in some cases fundraising ourselves so we could pass the money raised on to local organisations. We know that as an organisation which has a

purpose about supporting and advising local VCSE organisations, there is a big conflict in becoming a funder, and it is not something we would want to do outside of exceptional circumstances. But we once again find ourselves in exceptional circumstances, and all around us organisations are worrying about whether they have a future beyond the next energy price increase.

At the point of their closure in July, our local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) was able to identify some funding to support VCSE organisations. Through discussion with the VCSE representatives within the CCG board, they understood the upcoming challenges that organisations in the voluntary and community sector were going to face, while trying to meet rising demand for their services. They made £300,000 available to Connected Voice to put in place some support. At that point in time we didn't have information about the energy price cap, or the inflation rates that we are now seeing – but we knew that things were going to become very hard for the poorest people in our region, so we were keen to do something.

We have used £15,000 of the funding to work with an independent grants assessor, who has helped us to develop the fund criteria and manage the grants process. The rest of the money will go out to VCSE organisations in grants, as soon as possible after the deadline.

We all wish we weren't in the position of grant funder again, and we know the amount of

money we have available is a drop in the ocean compared to what will be required to support organisations through the next year – but it is some practical support at a time when it is needed more than ever. We were careful to ensure we weren't too prescriptive on what the grants will fund – because running costs differ vastly between organisations, and we know many of our members have very few paid staff, and in some cases no physical premises.

“ We are very aware we are not the only organisation stepping outside of our 'day job' to provide crisis support

We are also very aware we are not the only organisation stepping outside of our 'day job' to provide crisis support. Increasingly VCSE organisations are stepping in to meet basic needs for the people they support. It is now over twenty years since the first food bank was established in the UK, and I think we all felt that in the early days of austerity when food banks became more common, they would be a short term solution. They are now a widely accepted part of the social fabric in local communities, alongside clothing banks and organisations providing baby equipment and sanitary products. Every volunteer hour spent providing for these basic needs is obviously of huge value – but it is also an hour that is not spent on the work that supports an organisation's core mission. So many organisations these days are providing crisis support that sometimes the day job becomes a lower priority – whether that is a youth group providing free lunches over the summer, or a community centre staying open to keep people

warm. Organisations have been enormously creative in the ways they have managed to meet the needs of their beneficiaries while maintaining a core offer – but I know from discussions with them that they would love to be able to focus on the 'day job' again and see people turning up to access their services safe, warm, happy and with a full stomach. Meeting basic needs can also be a distraction from the strategic campaigning and lobbying work that organisations in our sector need to do to create the structural change we need to move out of crisis mode.

Clearly, the government needs to put in place some support very quickly to make sure that what we are currently calling a crisis doesn't become a disaster for many. The amount of money people will require to meet rising costs in all areas of their lives is absolutely out of reach for many. Citizens Advice estimate that the energy price increases alone in October will be 'impossible' for 25% of people in

“ Citizens Advice estimate that the energy price increases alone in October will be 'impossible' for 25% of people in this country

this country – and millions more people will begin to struggle within a few months. The impact that the prospect of this is having on mental health is already very significant and it will be organisations in our sector who will be the first port of call for many of these people in need of support.

This is a stressful time for VCSE organisations who are not only worried about their beneficiaries, but increasingly about their own survival. Please get in touch with us if you need some advice, or even just to talk through the challenges with a supportive listener ●

Where to Find Local Support Online Around the Cost of Living



Connected Voice has developed an online [cost of living support directory](#). Whilst not an exhaustive list, it does contain information about key organisations and services from across Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East, as well as some national services. There's an option to filter by geographical area, and also by the different types of support available.



DIY ADVOCATE

[DIY Advocate](#) is a free online service from Connected Voice Advocacy that helps people to work through problems step-by-step, get information and make an action plan. There's information and links to a wide range of national support and services but there's an option to filter these by category.



[OurGateshead.org](#) is the community website managed by Connected Voice. It's an online space where you can find things to do and ways to help (volunteering) across Gateshead. From the home page, there's a link to 'Discover Help and Support'. It's free to add information to Our Gateshead and we ask organisations to update their listings when things change.



[Information Now](#) is an information website for people in Newcastle. It has a comprehensive list of [where to get local advice and support](#) around a range of issues, where to get free and cheap food in Newcastle, as well as tips and links to national schemes and services. From the home page you can search by a range of categories and see the most popular articles.

Sir James Knott Trust

Jack Summerside
Support and Development
Officer



“Our Trustees recognise that there is a real need for funding and have pledged to continue funding at the same level



Photo of Jo Curry smiling

For the Funding pages in this edition, I caught up with Jo Curry from the Sir James Knott Trust, a major local family charitable trust with a focus on supporting organisations and projects that help improve the conditions of people living and working in the North East of England. I asked her for a funder’s perspective on the Cost Of Living Crisis. Jo told me:

“It is clear that rises in the cost of basics such as food and fuel are driving some people in the North East further into poverty. The impact on health, wellbeing and community resilience is staggering. People have tough choices to make, and they are vulnerable. Local charities will step up. Emergency food parcels will ramp up again, debt and benefit advice will continue to be offered, homelessness provision will be available, but ultimately all of this must be paid for at a time when the public do not have cash to spare. We might anticipate that fundraising events and donations will stagnate as people feel the pinch.

It is also clear that some charities are having difficulties in filling posts. It is inevitable that this year people who work in charities will expect significant pay increases, in order not to face a pay cut in real terms. In my working life, I have never seen anything more than a 2 or 3% pay increase, but for the first time, this year, a pay rise of 9% does

not seem like an unreasonable expectation for employees across all sectors. With other overheads rising in charities, it would take a magician to square that circle. It is reasonable to expect that charities will come to grant funders to bridge the gap.

The current turbulence in the financial markets has a significant effect on funders like the Sir James Knott Trust. As an endowed Trust, the income of the Trust is from dividends received for the investments. Having bounced back from the downturn caused by the pandemic, now inflation and the invasion of Ukraine is causing a great deal of uncertainty. As a result, the income forecast is down, and the capital value of the endowment has been reduced. Despite this our Trustees recognise that there is a real need for funding and have pledged to continue to fund at the same level as last year and make £2.3m in grants, even if this means eating into reserves. It is not lost on us that the real value of our grants is effectively almost 10% lower this year though. As a Trust we have cautiously moved towards making larger and longer-term grants. We often make grants of £5,000 per year for 3 years towards running costs, we sometimes award £10,000 a year for 3 years and occasionally go to £15,000. It is unlikely that our

grants will increase by anything like inflation. At the Sir James Knott Trust, we are pragmatic and flexible in our grant making. If it becomes apparent that the funding already made to a charity will not cover what was envisaged, then we are open to discussions about adapting the grant for example from a full time to a part time post. We have occasionally increased the grants made to a capital project.

When we receive applications that are eligible for funding, we always have more requests than we can meet. When people in communities across the North East are going hungry, or are cold, or live in unsuitable homes, it is likely that tough choices will have to be made by funders about what we fund. We are likely to fund local rather than national, and we are likely to prioritise charitable activity that provides for basic needs rather than the sorts of activities that enhance life.

“We are likely to fund local rather than national, and we are likely to prioritise charitable activity that provides for basic needs

We will continue to look for ways to reduce our overheads. This will include moving to smaller offices so that we will have more money for grant making. When people in communities are desperate and the charities that support them need resourcing it really is the very least that we can do.

I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to offer tips to applicants to all funders; but if you are considering making an application to the Sir James Knott Trust, by all means telephone us to discuss what you need and how to shape the

request. If you are operating as a CIC we will expect to see a realistic business plan with income based on trading. Funders will have a look at the amount of free reserves as a proportion of annual expenditure and so it is worth having a detailed reserves policy and making prudent use of designating reserves. There has always been a trend for multi-year grants to be tapered, but don't be shy in asking for an inflation proof uplift.

“Know that you are valued and make sure you take the time to recharge your own batteries

Finally, if you work in or volunteer in a charity, remember that you can only do your best; you are not a miracle worker and you don't have the macro-economic levers to immediately alleviate poverty. So, know that you are valued and make sure that you take the time to recharge your own batteries before you go again. Helping people that are in distress and managing the unmanageable is relentless. It ultimately achieves nothing if you totally burn yourself out.”

So the clear advice is to speak with your existing funders. All the costs that Jo describes are likely to continue to increase with rising inflation and the increasing costs of energy – particularly as businesses and charitable organisations, especially those with premises, have no price cap on fuel costs.

If you're not in the habit of budgeting ahead, now is a very good time to start. A clear itemised budget helps you identify current costs, plan for different scenarios – and crucially gives you the information you'll need to discuss and present costs with your current and future funders ●

If you need support around funding [get in touch with us](#) and [subscribe to our bulletins](#) for the latest funding opportunities

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