

Spotlight

Resilience and Renewal: The VCSE Sector in Challenging Times

Featuring:

Projects4Change and Blaydon Youth and Community Centre
Pages 4 and 14

Also in this issue

Page 7
Introducing Newcastle Community Bridgebuilders

Page 18
Guest article by Mark Libby from the CSJ Foundation

Cover photo: A group of eight young boys from Projects4Change happily jumping from a giant bench in front of a lake

Contents

Introduction by Lisa Goodwin, Chief Executive	3
Spotlight: Projects 4 Change	4
How Connected Voice Business Services has been supporting VCSE organisations	6
Introducing Newcastle Community Bridgebuilders	7
A spotlight on our Organisational Strength Reviews	8
How Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network helps create more resilient communities	10
Finding community and collaboration in Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' Network	12
Spotlight: Blaydon Youth and Community Centre	14
The role of our Hate Crime Advocacy Service in challenging times	16
Resilience and Renewal: The VCSE in Challenging Times	18

About this magazine

As of 2025, Connected Voice Magazine is published twice 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.

If you have any queries about this magazine email connect@connectedvoice.org.uk

Issue 22: Resilience and Renewal - The VCSE Sector in Challenging Times

The Spring 2025 issue of Connected Voice Magazine, 'Resilience and Renewal - The VCSE Sector in Challenging Times', intentionally matches the theme of our 2025 AGM.

We hear from our Chief Executive Lisa Goodwin about why it was important for us to choose this theme right now, and how important the notions of resilience and renewal are to small charities in particular.

For our Newcastle-based Spotlight, we hear from Projects4Change about the wide variety of youth work they offer, and how this has boosted the resilience of their young people. For our Gateshead-

based Spotlight, we speak to Blaydon Youth and Community Centre about how their work has evolved over the years, and how they're meeting the needs of their communities now.

Elsewhere, we hear from Mark Libby from the CSJ Foundation, and Neil Denton introduces the Newcastle Community Bridgebuilders initiative. There are also plenty of insights from our team, including from our Advocacy team, Business Services, Support and Development, and Volunteering.

We hope you enjoy this issue and welcome any questions you may have! ●

Resilience and Renewal - The VCSE Sector in Challenging Times

Lisa Goodwin
Chief Executive



We chose the theme 'Resilience and Renewal - The VCSE Sector in Challenging Times' for this edition of the magazine to tie in with the theme of our 2025 AGM. Resilience is a topic we talk about regularly in the local VCSE sector. Many of us feel we require a huge amount of resilience right now, as we deal with the competing pressures of high demand, increasing life challenges for some of those we support, reduced availability of funding, and increased running costs for our organisations.

“Renewal is something our sector goes through constantly, responding to needs as they emerge by updating, adapting and tailoring services as society changes around us.

That's why it's really important that those of us working or volunteering in charities seek out opportunities for peer support and make time for them. Making time to connect with others sometimes feels like a luxury when you are busy trying to keep services going, but I would encourage everyone involved with running charities or community groups to please make the time where you can - especially by coming along to one of our regular Connected Voice networks! Each time we host a networking event, we can predict that people will comment to us on how good it is to get away from

the day-to-day work for a bit of time and meet with like-minded groups.

Renewal is something our sector goes through constantly, responding to needs as they emerge by updating, adapting and tailoring services as society changes around us. In this edition of Connected Voice Magazine, we showcase examples of this from our own Hate Crime Advocacy Service, which ramped up support for people after the riots across the country and our North East region last summer. We also hear about how the services at Blaydon Youth and Community Centre and Projects4Change have grown and adapted over the years, to meet changing local needs. We are also delighted to have a guest article from Mark Libby from the CSJ Foundation about how important resilience and renewal is in small charities, and how much we rely on them.

We are privileged to witness many examples of resilience across our sector on a daily basis. We know that the support we offer at Connected Voice can only ever go a small way towards supporting VCSE organisations in their missions, and that it takes a huge amount of dedication and resilience to run a charity in the current climate. We hope that some of the articles we've shared in this edition provide some inspiration and hope at what is a profoundly challenging time for so many organisations. ●

Spotlight: Projects4Change



Projects4Change addresses the needs, voice and rights of young people. It works within communities and in partnership with others to create youth work projects which help young people to develop and flourish into adulthood.

www.projects4change.org

What does your organisation do?

Projects4Change is an evolving youth and community work charity. We started with no seed money at all - just the determination of our board of trustees and a founder with a mix of professional skills and lived experience - but together we have built an organisation that is both needed and effective in supporting some of the most vulnerable young people in our area.

Tell us about your key projects

We deliver various youth-led targeted and open-access youth work sessions every week, including detached youth work sessions, school-based provision, and outdoor counselling in nature (for example).

We regularly incorporate environmental projects into our sessions at our two green spaces, Betty's Hut and Garden and Blakelaw Allotment. We also provide one-to-one support for young people who are in crisis, or who want to progress on to other communities.

Furthermore, we frequently facilitate life-changing experiences including sailing, youth exchanges and residential. Our young people also have access to the arts thanks to our strong partnerships.

Demand for our services has risen significantly since Covid-19, and

there has been a need for more integrated support for isolated, anxious and vulnerable young people, as well as school non-attenders.

Due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, many young people are also struggling to stay warm and fed, in addition to encountering issues accessing online support and getting to places where they can find appropriate help. Fortunately, we know our young people, and so we can check in on them and listen to their struggles and concerns.

Our projects are for *all* young people, but mainly address the needs and voices of under-represented and disadvantaged young people. Our projects exist in

“ We have built an organisation that is both needed and effective in supporting some of the most vulnerable young people in our area.

an area and moment of high need and, as mentioned above, demand for our services has been on the rise.

We provide belonging, inclusion and a shared vision for a better world with our young people. We recognise that young people experience the world differently and that their needs are not always taken into consideration, and that's why we work so hard to listen to young people.

We have also recently completed a

capital build application and have requested planning permission for a new structure - which we are calling The Cowshed - to extend our offer, increase the capacity of our project, and better serve local young people. It is proposed that The Cowshed will sit on the same site as Betty's Hut and Garden and will enable us to work with 122 more young people per week.

“Our projects are for all young people, but mainly address the needs and voices of under-represented and disadvantaged young people.

How has Connected Voice supported you?

Connected Voice has supported us to identify relevant funding sources over the years, and the team also guided us through updating our safeguarding policy in 2022 - of course, working with young people, this is of the utmost importance to us. We know we can call on Connected Voice if we need additional support and expertise outside of our team.

What do people say about your organisation?

Here is what some of our young people have had to say about our work:

“The group helped me feel more comfortable around different people, and now I talk to people that I didn't talk to before. I didn't even know what youth work was before, now I go to Betty's Hut and have made more friends. I have also met new people who live just round the corner from me - two of them are from Poland.

“They [the architects building the new structure] came to Betty's Hut, and we stood and mapped out the footprint of the building. We also did diaries with the other young people during that session.

Visit www.projects4change.org to find out more ●



Photos: A young man spray painting a wall at Projects4Change HQ (left); a group of six young men pose in front of the spray painted wall at Projects4Change HQ (right)

How Connected Voice Business Services is supporting financial sustainability

Giovanni Spatuzzi

Deputy Chief Executive, Connected Voice



Our Deputy Chief Executive Giovanni Spatuzzi discusses how Connected Voice Business Services has been supporting VCSE organisations this year

The financial sustainability of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector has become increasingly uncertain due to rising costs, heightened demand, and growing competition for contracts and grants.

In response to these challenges, we at Connected Voice sought additional resources from Newcastle City Council to support the work of our Business Services team. This enabled us to offer free support to VCSE organisations across the city, with particular focus on financial planning and sustainability.

From May 2024 to April 2025 - which marked the end of the free support period - a total of 85 small to medium-sized organisations benefitted from our services. Collectively, organisations received a total of 753 hours of support, with an average of 9 hours per organisation. The support included a range of important financial services, such as:

- Advice on financial policies and procedures
- Guidance on financial record-keeping and bookkeeping
- Assistance with year-end account preparation
- VAT advice

The financial landscape for VCSE organisations is further complicated by the rising Employer National Insurance Contributions (ERNICs) and the National Living Wage (NLW) that is set to take effect

from April. According to a recent report by the VCSE National Data and Insights Observatory at Nottingham Trent University, titled *Paying the Price: Difficult Decisions in an Uncertain Financial Landscape (2025)*, nearly half of the VCSE organisations surveyed anticipate negative financial impacts this year. In the North East alone, the increases in ERNICs and the introduction of the NLW are projected to cost charities an estimated £19.5 million annually, as our partners at VONNE have noted.

While these upcoming changes may not impact some micro, small, volunteer-led organisations directly, they do coincide with broader sector challenges. Organisations that can adapt to these changes are best placed to navigate the ever-evolving landscape. However, this will involve making some difficult decisions around priorities, resources, and service delivery. For some, this may involve restructuring operations, re-evaluating funding models, or even scaling back services to maintain sustainability in an increasingly demanding environment.

In all, going forward, the VCSE sector faces a complex and challenging financial landscape. We at Connected Voice remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting organisations through these turbulent times, and we want to help them build resilience and sustainability for the future. By providing essential financial guidance and support, we hope to empower VCSE organisations to make informed decisions despite the uncertainties ahead ●

Introducing Newcastle Community Bridgebuilders

Neil Denton

Professor in Practice, Durham University
and Associate, The Relationships Project

Neil Denton, Professor in Practice at Durham University, Associate at The Relationships Project and Independent Community Mediator, introduces the Newcastle Community Bridgebuilders

A new initiative is being launched to strengthen relationships, bridge community divides, and create a more connected Newcastle. Will you be a part of it?

We're at a crossroads. In an era of instant communication, we've technically never been more connected, and yet many of us feel more isolated than ever. At the time of writing, loneliness affects one in four people in the UK, and our young people are the loneliest in Europe. All of this begs one important question: what's missing?

The answer lies not in the quantity of connections we make, but in their *quality*. Too many of our interactions nowadays lack real meaning. The bridges that connect us - that is, the bridges between individuals, communities, and across differences - are often weaker than they should be. And when these connections cannot sustain meaningful conversations, misunderstandings can grow, which can erode trust and deepen divisions.

At its worst, this can lead to 'enemy thinking' and seeing those who are different from us as a threat rather than as fellow human beings. Instead of building bridges, we build walls that separate and isolate us. Behind these walls, we hear only what reinforces our fears and suspicions, which can make it harder to understand and empathise with those on the other side.

Our communities have been tested significantly by the pandemic, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and last summer's civil unrest. But history shows that connected communities thrive and are more resilient,

healthier, happier and stronger in the face of challenges. So, now is the time to build better bridges!

Thanks to dedicated Government funding, Newcastle City Council has partnered with Connected Voice, The Centre for Creative Conversation, and The Relationships Project to strengthen relationships within and between communities. This initiative will:

- Celebrate the connections that make Newcastle one of the friendliest cities in the UK.
- Support those working to strengthen community ties, further developing their skills to engage in meaningful conversations.
- Create a network of 'bridgebuilders' to foster understanding and collaboration.

Over a planned six workshops, the initiative will train 160 community leaders, professionals and volunteers to create new bridges, strengthen existing ones, and repair those that have been neglected or damaged.

If you believe in the power of human connection, we need you. If you want to strengthen relationships, now is the time to step forward. If you're passionate about building a more united Newcastle, join now and be part of this important journey. Let's build bridges and create a stronger, more connected city.

Please send any expressions of interest to josh.foster@connectedvoice.org.uk, with the subject line 'Newcastle Community Bridgebuilders'. ●

A spotlight on our Organisational Strength Reviews

Jeremy Cain
Support and Development
Coordinator, Connected Voice



Our Support and Development Coordinator Jeremy Cain shines a spotlight on our Organisational Strength Review service

Everyone knows the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, the rich but miserable man whose life is changed by the visitation of three ghosts on Christmas Eve. Whether you've read Dickens' original or watched the Muppets' brilliant retelling, it's hard to avoid peeking at your own life just in case the spirits come knocking at the door.

Like few stories can, it demonstrates the power of self-reflection to bring about positive change. Indeed, it caused the

“ We know the voluntary sector - we've had 95 years' experience of being at its heart - and this puts us in a good position to be constructively critical.

Victorians to take a long hard look at themselves, and with positive results: in 1844 *The Gentleman's Magazine* attributed a rise of charitable giving in Britain to the story, while across the pond an American businessman was so moved that he closed his factory on Christmas Day and sent every employee a turkey!

At Connected Voice, we're more interested in organisational self-reflection rather than personal, but the idea is much the same. We work with hundreds of charities, social enterprises and community groups every year and

know from experience that the best ones - those that are most resilient and capable of renewal - are those that can take a long, hard look at themselves. Just like Scrooge, self-reflection can bring about positive change.

Of course, it's not always easy to be objective; we're all passionate about what we do, and that emotional attachment can make us either too hard or too easy on ourselves. That's both natural and understandable, but if we're trying to be productively honest, it helps to have a critical friend. That's where Connected Voice comes in.

We know the voluntary sector - we've had 95 years' experience of being at its heart - and this puts us in a good position to be constructively critical. But we don't just know it, we love it: every day we see the positive changes it brings, and we want to see more! As a result, we're driven by a desire to see you and your organisation succeed.

In practice, one of the ways we try to do this is through an Organisational Strength Review. It's a collaborative process, combining your passion and knowledge about your organisation with ours. As a result, very good things can happen.

The aim is to identify specific, practical actions that can improve your operation and enhance your impact. Together, we explore four areas: organisational

culture, governance, finance, and outcomes. We do this by interviewing key people - trustees, staff, volunteers and service users - to get an in-depth understanding of how things are really working. We then review all relevant documentation including your constitution, policies, procedures, and minutes of meetings.

“ The result is a tightly focussed report that makes specific recommendations to improve your organisation, backed up by data and observation.

That’s the first stage. The second stage is more reflective, looking at what we’ve learnt and identifying areas for improvement - we compare your way of working to organisations who are doing similar things and see if there’s anything you might benefit from. Again, this is done in a collaborative spirit; we’re not looking to mark you down, we’re looking to big you up!

The result is a tightly focussed report

that makes specific recommendations to improve your organisation, backed up by data and observation. Afterwards, what you do with the report is entirely up to you. It’s your document and we won’t be sharing it with anyone else. However, we obviously hope you’ll implement the recommendations and, when you do, we’ll be here to help.

It might not be life-changing, but it can certainly change your organisation for the better. But don’t just take our word for it, here’s what the Young Women’s Outreach Project told us when we asked them for feedback:

“The Report made us look at our ‘norms’ and challenged our thinking. It made us think about accountability, quality standards, income diversity and general promotion of the organisation. For me personally, it has become an essential working document that will make us stronger and more resilient in the future.”

If you’re interested in discussing our Organisational Strength Review service, without any obligation, please contact jeremy.cain@connectedvoice.org.uk for more details and a quote ●



Photo: Three members of Connected Voice’s Support and Development team working around a laptop in a meeting room at One Strawberry Lane

How Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network helps create more resilient communities

Laurie Zebik

Gateshead Volunteering Development
Coordinator, Connected Voice



Connected Voice's Laurie Zebik explains how the Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network promotes resilience in communities

When we think of resilience, we tend to think of the ability to 'bounce back' in difficult situations, or the ability to withstand numerous challenges. However, volunteer coordination and management can involve an array of challenges that are often more complex and may therefore require a different approach to your typical 'work' style challenges.

Within organisations, we often have colleagues who fulfil a similar role, someone who we work closely alongside. In volunteer management, however, this isn't necessarily - or often - the case. It is not unusual to see volunteer

“ It really helps to know that there are other people out there in similar roles who are facing similar challenges, and that we have somewhere to come together and share these.

coordination and management roles that are part-time or have just the one member of staff dedicated to the role, often within wider teams that may not have the full picture of what exactly the role entails.

The creation of the Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network has provided a forum for volunteer

coordinators, managers, and other professionals to share their successes and challenges. It is a safe space for discussion, development and growth. Working in a position where you are single-handedly responsible for one area can have its own challenges - especially when other colleagues may not necessarily have the same knowledge of that role - so having a network that brings people together to discuss the day-to-day issues of working in these roles is invaluable in maintaining resilience.

Above all, it really helps to know that there are other people out there in similar roles who are facing similar challenges, and that we have somewhere to come together and share these - and somewhere to share our successes, too!

The climate around volunteer coordination and management is ever-changing, with new challenges popping up all the time, and all sorts of changing external trends to navigate. Our most recent Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network meeting this March focused on 'Digital in Volunteering', and we approached this from the angle of what digital tools are out there, and what might assist volunteering professionals in their day-to-day work. We also circulated a guide to digital for volunteer-involving

organisations. On the day, there were some really interesting conversations between attendees, particularly regarding the use of AI (artificial intelligence) and what the implications

meeting was yet another example of how having an open forum to ask questions, build connections and share knowledge is of great benefit to volunteer-involving organisations across Gateshead, and how it can help promote resilience in the longer term.

“ **The climate around volunteer coordination and management is ever-changing, with new challenges popping up all the time, and all sorts of changing external trends to navigate.**

To find out more about Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network, how to join, and to receive updates about upcoming meetings, drop us a line at volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk - our team would be thrilled to hear from you! ●

of this might be. We also heard a great deal about the various volunteer management systems that organisations use, and how each of these works. The



Photos: Sarah Cotton, CEO of Chopwell Regeneration Project, speaking at a network meeting in December 2024 (top); attendees engaging in a discussion at a network meeting in March 2025 (middle); representatives from Disability North presenting at a network meeting in October 2024 (bottom)

Finding community and collaboration in Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' Network

Nimerta Virdee

Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager, Connected Voice



Our Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager Nimerta Virdee discusses the impact of the Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' Network on its first anniversary

Our volunteers bring so much to our organisations. Volunteers can help us to be resilient in tough times through the additional capacity that they bring, through their ideas and lived experience that helps us to make the best decisions, and through the joy they bring to our workplaces.

Our volunteers get a lot back too, including developing new skills, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness, finding a sense of purpose, making friends, and building a sense of community, all of which supports them to have resilience in an increasingly uncertain world.

“Volunteers can help us to be resilient in tough times through the additional capacity that they bring, through their ideas and lived experience, and through the joy they bring to our workplaces.”

Community is a word that best comes to mind when thinking about the impact of the Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' and Managers' Network. This network, started in April 2024, is an initiative driven in partnership by both Connected Voice and Volunteer Centre Newcastle. It has brought a sense of renewal to the

volunteering landscape in Newcastle, something that had suffered significantly in the post-Covid world.

This February, we held a celebration event to mark one year of this new network. The event has held at the stunning Newcastle Cathedral, who are a network member, and was attended by 52 people, including a mixture of both volunteer coordinators and managers, and volunteers themselves.

Our Keynote Speaker was the Leader of Newcastle City Council, Councillor Karen Kilgour. Councillor Kilgour gave a heartfelt speech that told of her own journey with volunteering, and the important role that the voluntary sector plays in community cohesion. We were also delighted to hear from four volunteers: Liz Kelly and Chris Tabernam from Newcastle Cathedral; and Marc McAndrew and Mabel Darko from Friends Action North East.

All the volunteers spoke about what brought them to their roles and what they get from it - we even had a some singing from Chris, who we discovered was a keen performer! Towards the end of the event, we also had the pleasure of being joined by 'Millin' About', the volunteer choir from women's charity The Millin Charity. They treated us to a few empowering a cappella songs

and spoke about the critical work the charity does for women. The event was rounded off by an hour of networking while we enjoyed an afternoon tea

“**Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators’ and Managers’ Network has brought a sense of renewal to the volunteering landscape in Newcastle, something that had suffered significantly in the post-Covid world.**”

buffet prepared by the staff and volunteers of The Oswin Project, who run Cafe 16 inside the Cathedral.

The Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators’ and Managers’ Network will continue to foster this sense of collaboration at the next meeting on Tuesday 6 May, at One Strawberry Lane, where we will plan for the upcoming National Volunteers’ Week taking place from Monday 2 - Sunday 8 June.

To find out more about Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators’ and Managers’ Network, including details of upcoming meetings, please email volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk, or you can always contact me directly at nimerta.virdee@connectedvoice.org.uk ●



Photos: Conneced Voice’s Nimerta Virdee presenting at the event at Newcastle Cathedral in February 2025 (top); attendees getting involved in a task at a network meeting in January 2025 (middle); attendees chatting ahead of the event at Newcastle Cathedral in February 2025 (bottom)

Spotlight: Blaydon Youth and Community Centre



Blaydon Youth and Community Centre is a fast-paced and diverse charity that is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of its residents. It is based on Shibdon Road in Blaydon and works with a wide range of people across west Gateshead - primarily in Blaydon and Winlaton.

www.blaydonycc.org.uk

What does your organisation do?

Blaydon Youth and Community Centre is a fast-paced and diverse charity dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in west Gateshead, particularly in area ranked within the top 10-20% of multiple deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019). Our mission is to be an enabling hub, promoting and providing quality activities and services that support the physical, social, economic and emotional wellbeing of our community.

Originally established in the early 1950s, we moved to our current premises on Shibdon Road in 2014. Our newly renovated and modern facilities include a community cafe, multi-purpose rooms, a large sports hall, and an outdoor garden area, enabling us to deliver a broad range of essential services to children, young people, families and older residents within Blaydon, Winlaton, and surrounding areas.

Tell us about your key projects

We tackle inequality by creating opportunities for all, fostering community support, and investing in sustainable growth. Our services are delivered through our Community Centre and also through our Ofsted-registered childcare at the Blaydon and Winlaton Family Hub. We engage over 350 young people each week through out childcare, out of school clubs, and youth clubs. Additionally,

we support over 20,000 members of our community annually through projects such as our over 50s socials, fitness sessions, family cooking projects, SEND/sensory support, gardening activities, our community cafe, and much more!

By delivering affordable and accessible programmes, we empower individuals, raise aspirations, and promote social cohesion. We remain committed to evolving with community needs, ensuring a better future for all.

How has Connected Voice supported you?

Over the last six years, Connected Voice have been an invaluable source of support for Blaydon Youth and Community Centre. Their expert guidance was instrumental

“ We remain committed to evolving with community needs, ensuring a better future for all. ”

as we navigated the legal transition to becoming a Charitable Incorporate Organisation (CIO), ensuring a smooth and compliant process.

Beyond this, working with Connected Voice has provided us with access to a huge range of training and events, covering essential topics such as governance; equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); key sector updates, and opportunities to work with like-minded organisations. This ongoing support and access to resources has kept us informed of sector

developments, assisted with our operational and strategic efficiency, and given us confidence that our foundations are robust.

As a result, we have been able to move forward with our strategic plans, expand our provision, and create even more opportunities for the people we serve. Their advocacy and expertise have empowered us to grow, adapt, and continue making a meaningful impact in our community.

What do people say about your organisation?

“After my husband passed away just before lockdown in a very bad place. My family don't live nearby, so I decided to join the walking group. Best decision I have made. They are a very friendly group and I've made lots of friends and we have lots of outings together, which I never thought would happen again at my age.

“The youth clubs and activities have really helped me make new friends and be a more confident person. I am in Year 11, and I'm due to leave school and go to college soon, but I have been really anxious about the big changes like the new environment and new people and new teachers - everything really! I don't make friends easily and I find it really hard to be confident around new people and speak to them. Layla and Katie have really helped with improving my confidence and have worked with me to show me that I can make friends and try new things, and that being a little scared or nervous isn't a bad thing. Thank you!

To find out more about what we do, you can get in touch via email at info@blaydonycc.org.uk, or give us a call on 0191 414 7849. ●



Photos: A group of children and young people gardening (left); a young boy wearing large blue glasses pictured outside with a baby frog on his hand (right)

The role of our Hate Crime Advocacy Service in challenging times

Jane Kingston
Head of Advocacy, Connected Voice



Our Head of Advocacy Jane Kingston introduces our unique Hate Crime Advocacy Service, and discusses the key role it has to play in supporting communities through challenging times

We at Connected Voice have been delivering a specialist advocacy service to victims of hate crime since 2017. The service is funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria and is the first and only specialist service of its kind.

The term 'hate crime' is defined as "any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic."

“Our Hate Crime Advocacy Service adapted delivery in response to the rise in racial unrest that swept the UK in summer 2024.

The five protected characteristics monitored by the police are race, faith, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender identity. Consistently within our Hate Crime Advocacy Service, the most frequently recorded cases to support have been race-related incidents.

A responsive service

Our Hate Crime Advocacy Service adapted delivery in response to the rise in racial unrest that swept the UK

in summer 2024. The riots, particularly those here in the North East, led to a significant rise in fear and upset in our communities. People coped by adapting their behaviour - many told us that they were avoiding public transport, working from home, and even keeping children off school for short periods out of fear for their safety.

Despite us being a relatively small team, we put extra awareness into raising awareness of our Hate Crime Advocacy Service. Social media campaigns including case studies were launched to raise awareness of what victims of hate crime may experience, and how we can help. We also have a series of films on our website to illustrate what hate crimes look like, and to hear from victims about the difference having an advocate can make in terms of being believed, supported and represented.

A strategic approach

Following the racial unrest last summer, Connected Voice took a strategic approach and sat on Joint Engagement Group and Hate Crime and Community Tension Group meetings in each local authority area to raise awareness to all statutory and non-statutory agencies about the provision of advocacy for victims of hate crime. These groups met quickly online and were focused on the immediate problem, making it easy to

collaborate. Data was shared by all agencies to assess the risks and reality of the situation, which helped to avoid any myths and misrepresentations.

The Haref Network events also afforded us an opportunity to reach out and raise awareness of our service to Haref members - this gave us a direct route to speak to affected people within marginalised communities and to offer our support.

“ The riots, particularly those here in the North East, led to a significant rise in fear and upset in our communities.

A simplified pathway

Having a newly simplified referral pathway was also essential in getting people the support they needed quickly. We now have an online referral form that goes directly to our triage team and is much more efficient in processing requests and getting people the help they need.

Referrals rose by 85% over the summer compared to the quarter before. To meet the extra demand, we channelled more resources into the service and adapted our existing Self Advocacy training and DIY Advocate© app to victims of hate crime.

Research partnerships

In summer 2024, Connected Voice Advocacy held an event to launch our second research report into the impact of hate crime and share ideas to improve our response. Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner Susan Dungworth - who has recently made hate crime a strategic priority for the area - opened the launch event, where attendees included representatives from the police, housing, adult social care, and VCSE organisations.

The research team - which was led by Durham University sociologist Professor Catherine Donovan and included Durham University sociologist Professor Stephen Macdonald and Dr John Clayton from the Human Geography department at Northumbria University - produced two reports. The research also produced a toolkit for professionals to help identify what a hate crime is and how to handle them.

The toolkit also introduced the term 'hate relationships' to describe repeated incidents of hate directed at a person and/or their family by the same perpetrators who live nearby. This suggests a new way of thinking about some experiences of hate where:

- The perpetrators live near and are known to those they target.
- There are repeated experiences of hate that are not all physical violence.
- The impacts for those targeted are profound in terms of their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Victims and their families feel entrapped and isolated.

These hate relationships can have a profound cumulative impact, and yet researchers found that victims are often passed from organisation to organisation, and their complaints can be misunderstood, minimised and may therefore go unresolved. They also found a lack of clarity around which services are available to assist in responding to hate.

To find out more about our Hate Crime Advocacy Service, including the research we've been involved in, visit www.connectedvoice.org.uk/advocacy/hate-crime-advocacy

If you require further information, you can contact us directly at advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk, or give us a call on 0191 235 7013 ●

Resilience and Renewal: The VCSE in Challenging Times

Mark Libby
Regional Manager (North East),
CSJ Foundation

Mark Libby, Regional Manager for the North East at The Centre for Social Justice's Foundation, emphasises the resilience of the VCSE sector in the UK, and offers some encouraging insights amidst the challenges

Working in the charity sector is an incredible experience. Across the country, there are many brilliant organisations changing lives and building stronger communities. Behind these remarkable and dynamic enterprises are pioneering founders and inspiring leaders, bolstered by dedicated employees and volunteers, and supported by visionary philanthropists and funders. If all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing, it is the charity sector which takes a stand, rolls up its sleeves, and gets the job done.

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The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) was founded to listen and learn from local charities, the real specialists working tirelessly at the coalface. For several years, the CSJ Foundation has been active in the North East, spotlighting many local champions in its recommendations to government. Our recent addiction paper was conceived in Stockton, with many other reports shaped and informed by projects and programmes from the Tees to the Tweed.

These humbling conversations shine a light on the astonishing work taking

place, and the reality of the small charity emotional rollercoaster - the incredible highs of driving meaningful change, but also the crushing lows of ever-increasing challenges. Few interactions are as powerful as seeing the steely determination behind social action and systems change, or the teary smiles which accompany stories and testimonies of people overcoming barriers and rebuilding their lives. This comes with some sadness; from hearing about another charity closure, from sensing the despair of ever-growing service demand, and the painful news that yet another leader has cut their pay to keep their charity going.

Social need continues to skyrocket. 1 in 5 people across the UK are living in poverty, with 40% of this number considered 'very deep'. The use of foodbanks has also doubled in recent years, and complex needs have ballooned. 1 in 5 adults report having a diagnosed mental health condition, and 30% of the 9 million people registered as economically inactive cite long-term health problems. Over 15% of young men are not in education, employment or training, an increase of 150,000 compared to pre-Covid levels. Depressing metrics are sadly not hard to find.

Funding also continues to be stretched. Public services already face budget deficits, with more cuts on the horizon amid a growing and unsustainable welfare bill, predicted to rise from £48bn

to £75bn over the next five years. The more statutory services are overloaded, the more the burden spills onto small charities. There is an increasing sentiment that VCSE organisations are plugging too many gaps, becoming essential services themselves, but without the funding or even the recognition. Moral questions on the purpose of charity now run alongside the practical questions of sustainability.

We hear these frustrations loud and clear, from the North East and beyond. Across the country, our 'Big Listen' events have explored the problems and solutions faced by the charity sector. Two have taken place in Newcastle, both attended by many senior VCSE representatives, with several CSJ reports emerging from the discussions.

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Overlooked and Underfunded lifts the lid on some shocking imbalances: 85% of charitable funding goes to just 4% of charities, half of small charities receive no public income, and London-based charities receive 8x more funding than elsewhere in the country. The ten largest charities spend £243m per year on fundraising, more than the combined income of the 75,000 smallest. During lockdown, when small charities were ramping up programmes, the largest 100 charities furloughed 33,000 staff at a cost of £197m.

The dominance of large charities must change, and there is reason for optimism. Small charities are increasingly being recognised for their impact, and polling shows 76% of people view grassroots organisations more favourably than large, national providers. Our recent

Supercharging Philanthropy paper suggests a huge appetite to invest from high net worth individuals, with greater scope for rebalancing towards smaller, regional charities, plus significant potential for government match funding initiatives. Similarly, the UK's administrative landscape is evolving - for example, devolution deals now cover 90% of northern England. As strategic priorities become localised, and decisions are made closer to the ground, more opportunities are created for small charities to participate and play a crucial role in new partnerships.

Challenging times abound for the VCSE sector, with small charities increasingly asked to do more with less. Resilience continues to be tested, and sadly not all organisations survive. Small charities are the lifeblood of communities, and are not just impactful change agents for the people they serve, but incubators for innovation and policy ideas which shape the future. Society cannot prosper without these heroes. The context of devolution can help fuel a renewal which brings fantastic organisations and services to the fore.

The emotional rollercoaster for small charities will no doubt continue, with agony and joy both ever-present. The environment is hard, but the sector remains resilient; the highs outweighing the lows. No matter the burden of demand, inspirational people will roll up their sleeves and build a better world. On this society depends - perhaps wrongly - but good people will not stand idly by. The VCSE sector marches on, but amid the doom and gloom there are new opportunities to recognise small charities, to rethink services, and put small charities front and centre of the big picture conversation.

To find out more about the Centre for Social Justice, and the work of the CSJ Foundation, visit www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk ●

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