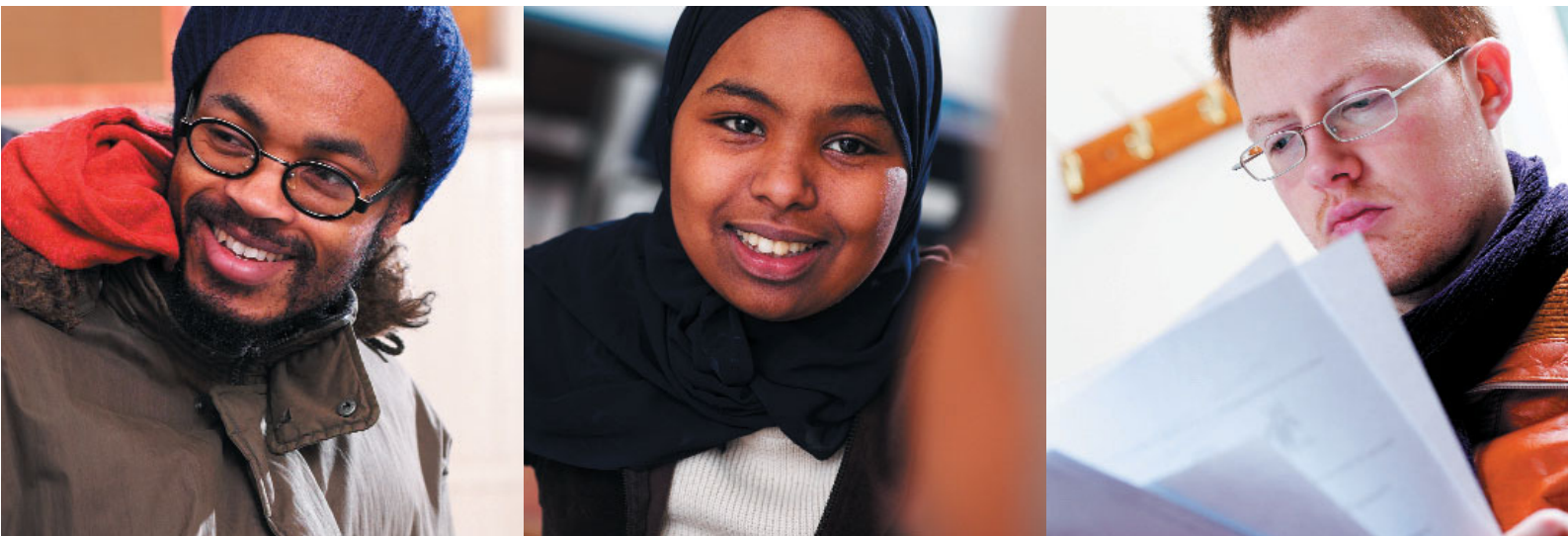


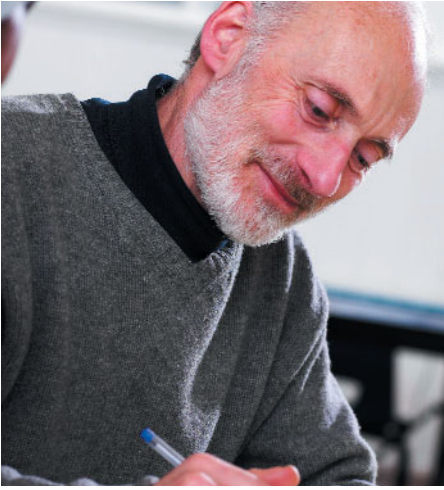
# Changing lives

CVS making a difference for local people



"CVS are at the very heart of the local voluntary and community sector – leading local activity and linking up across sectors. Without CVS, organisations falter and individuals miss life-changing opportunities. Put simply, CVS make things happen."

Mike Eastwood, Chair of NACVS



## Supporting role

This short publication gives a flavour of what CVS do, working behind the scenes, to ensure the long-term future of essential services. Most of all, it is about the lives of local people, which are touched, enriched and transformed as a result of their work.

NACVS expects its members to maintain high standards. Much of the work that they do focuses on several key areas: services and support; development work; liaison; representation; and strategic partnerships. This publication looks at what this means on the ground.

CVS provide many of the resources that local groups depend on, from access to meeting rooms, photocopiers and ICT equipment, to community accountancy and employment advice. Other support includes regular newsletters, training, funding advice and specialist services.

### We have the technology

Voluntary Action-Leeds' innovative IT support project, capaciTy, shows how, by assessing and responding to local needs, CVS can effectively meet a huge gap in service provision. Established over six years ago with money from the Community Fund, capaciTy provides technical support for both software and hardware; telephone support and site visits; email and web hosting; a voluntary sector web portal and low cost IT training, much of it in a dedicated training suite.

Community Greenspaces said: "The capaciTy project has helped us set up our email; networked our machines;

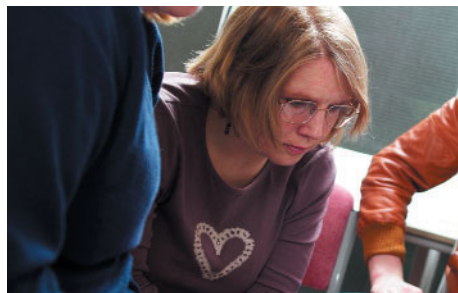
helped us with purchasing advice and our web-hosting. We could not have achieved this without you – an excellent service".

### Newcastle CVS helps to raise over £4 million

Fledgling voluntary organisations seeking their first grant, large organisations with failed funding bids and small organisations looking to expand all turn to Newcastle upon Tyne CVS for funding advice. Louise McGlen runs a telephone advice service, offers face-to-face consultations and publishes a monthly newsletter of funding sources.

The Comfrey Project is just one of Louise's many successes. It has blossomed from a pilot project into a programme with three years' secure funding able to run two allotments and promote health and well-being amongst refugees and asylum seekers.

This service has helped organisations across Newcastle to raise over £4 million in the space of a year.



## Innovative responses

Many of the essential public services we now take for granted were pioneered by the local voluntary and community sector. This tradition has continued into the 21st century, and today CVS take the lead, identifying gaps in service provision and developing innovative new ways to meet local need.

### CVS saves shelter in time for Christmas

Last Christmas, short-term intervention from St. Helen's CVS meant that local homeless people were fed and housed over the festive season.

The local centre for homeless people had folded but the need remained. The CVS stepped into the breach, galvanising a 40-strong army of volunteers to keep the centre open and eliciting tons of food and clothing donations. They even got the centre redecorated by

a team of volunteers from the Prince's Trust.

On top of this, the CVS raised in excess of £80,000 to provide a range of other services for homeless people: basic skills training to help tackle the underlying causes of homelessness; benefits and housing advice and support; counselling and referrals into drug and alcohol treatment programmes.

One young mother could hardly find words. "They were brilliant at Christmas," she said, having been housed and subsequently reunited with her two young children who had been staying with her parents.

### Grass roots support for excluded young people

Gareth\* isn't your typical voluntary sector manager. Until recently he was a heroin user and behind bars. But thanks to the Millennium

Volunteers programme run by Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau, he is now clean and doing well, with a new career. Gareth is just one of 200 young people who completed the programme last year. Many had similar backgrounds, but with enormous support from the CVS they completed, or even surpassed, 200 hours of volunteering.

The CVS also runs basic skills training in literacy and numeracy for young people, cleverly targeted at aspiring DJs or pop stars. Another course run by the CVS helps young people to deal with debt. Armed with new skills they are able to turn moneylenders away for the first time.

\* Gareth's name has been changed to protect his identity.

"...we are catering for people who wouldn't manage to stick at a college course without the additional support we offer."

Belinda Lewis, Chief Officer, Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau



## Pulling together

As a focal point for the local voluntary and community sector, CVS encourage networking between individuals and groups within the sector, and between local groups and the statutory and private sectors. Groups can learn from each other, establish contacts and work more effectively.

### Making the connections

Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Service, the CVS in Plymouth, plays a dual role in hosting and facilitating an Older Persons' Voluntary and Community Network. It brings together a range of voluntary and statutory organisations, including Age Concern, the primary care trust, befriending services and the Senior Citizens' Forum.

The network also helps and advises on consultations between the voluntary sector and service providers. It places

great emphasis on ensuring that wherever possible older people are able to represent themselves on local groups. This has led to positive action to tackle elder abuse.

Chair of the network, Ian Hay, explains: "It is about bringing people together to share information. Both the statutory and voluntary sectors find the network useful to disseminate information to a wider audience and to receive feedback".

### Building networks breaks down barriers

Three years ago, the local Islamic Centre in Exeter approached the CVS about holding English lessons in the local community, rather than at the College of Further Education. The aim was to promote greater take up amongst the Muslim community by providing a safe and

comfortable environment in the familiar surroundings of their local Mosque. The CVS was subsequently the trusted 'go-between', brokering arrangements between the Islamic Centre and the local College.

With increased funding, more partners have joined the project, the Chinese and Sikh communities have been included and classes provided in local businesses and homes.

It has been an important stepping stone for the many refugees and asylum seekers who brought professional skills with them, but who lacked language skills. For others, it has been a chance to brush up on their language skills, even though they have been in the country for many years.

...enhancing people's career options and building social cohesion, this project has helped the CVS build stronger ties with the Black and minority ethnic community...



## Having their say

With government encouraging the involvement of voluntary and community groups in shaping and delivering services, CVS enable the views of local groups to be represented.

### Putting marginalised communities on the map

On Merseyside, Sefton CVS helps the most marginalised and 'hard-to-reach' groups to get their message across to local decision-makers. Sefton Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Communities Network was established following a mapping exercise into the economic, health and education needs of this community.

Mike Homfray, Convenor of Sefton Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Communities Network says: "For the first time, we will be able to make a genuine contribution to the way that services are provided in the borough. We are already making plans to look at library services, advice work and

General Practice, and this simply would not have happened without the help of the CVS".

This has been a catalyst for change, prompting the local primary care trust to look at how its services meet the needs of the gay, lesbian and bisexual community.

### Honing sector skills

Some areas of the Midlands town of Tamworth suffer from high levels of deprivation. Funders recognised this and gave priority to bids from the area, yet most of the bids they received didn't meet the criteria. Tamworth CVS worked with the major funders to get a grip on the problem, which appeared to be that the local sector lacked the skills and resources to make use of this opportunity.

The CVS also organised a series of workshops where individual funders were able to help groups wishing to bid. Building on this momentum, the CVS also held

a highly successful funders' fair.

One of the groups to receive help was the Riverside Toy Library which was recently awarded £50,000 from the Community Fund. The CVS' role was essential: "The support and encouragement in preparing the bid was key", said co-ordinator Ann Riches.

Funders have also been quick to notice the difference. Karen Argyle, the West Midlands Manager of the Lloyds TSB Foundation, remarks: "As a result of successful CVS workshops and funding surgeries, we have noticed an increase in the number of applicants that have been received from the area. But more importantly, the quality of applications has vastly improved. This would not have happened without the CVS."

Sefton CVS has also helped to set up a family support network, a faith forum and is currently working with the local disabled community.

"For the first time, we will be able to make a genuine contribution to the way that services are provided in the borough..."



## Partners in action

CVS help many local groups to participate in a wide range of partnerships. These include regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, health and social care, learning and other government initiatives. They may be sub-regional, district wide or neighbourhood based.

### A web of partnerships

The South London Partnership – of six CVS working sub-regionally – was recently allocated the maximum award of £500,000 over two years by the Learning and Skills Council to deliver a Learning in the Community Programme. It has delivered a variety of high impact projects in each of the areas.

A group with hearing and mobility issues was involved in designing a course on how the Internet could improve their day-to-day lives. Mental health service users have been introduced to media skills, and worked with a local community

association in producing its magazine. "It was wicked and kept my mind occupied", commented one of the delighted participants.

People have learnt skills as diverse as web design, job interview skills, first aid, languages and confidence building. "My confidence has improved since doing the training. Being around other people . . . contributed to me being able to listen to others", said Chris, who attended the job interview skills course.

### Two-way communication

Ensuring that local voices are heard where decisions are made in the city has been key to Voscur's (the CVS in Bristol) success. Its words are certainly matched by its actions. Working through local groups, local people make their voices, experiences, and those of their own communities, heard at the decision-making table.

Local people now represent local needs on the key partnerships. Between them, representatives have made a major contribution to these partnerships, taking a lead in voicing concerns and influencing decisions: most recently on education spending.

CVS are local voluntary organisations which help to develop, support and promote the local voluntary and community sector through the kind of work featured in this leaflet. NACVS currently works with over 300 CVS across England.

Every CVS adopts a unique approach that reflects the character and the needs of its location. Names also differ, as indicated by the CVS case studies, but their purpose and values remain the same.

If you would like to follow up any of these case studies, you can find contact details for the CVS on the NACVS website.

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