

# Changing lives

CVS making a difference for local people

Services and support

Development work

Liaison

Representation

Strategic partnerships



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Voluntary sector infrastructure is by its very nature hidden to the vast majority of people. It is all too easy to underestimate the role played by Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) in their local communities. They act as catalysts in developing, supporting and bringing together many thousands of local organisations nationwide – over 140,000 at the last count. CVS galvanise voluntary action in their locality, representing the interests and building the capacity of the sector. They contribute a great deal in their own right and the following pages give a flavour of their achievements.

The work of each CVS is based around five key activities: services and support, development work, liaison, representation and strategic partnerships. Within this framework every CVS adopts a unique approach that reflects the character and the needs of its location. What remains constant is the impact that this work has both at a community and an individual level. People's lives are turned around and enriched, thanks to CVS. The other constant is the excellence with which such activity is delivered.

The CVS work showcased in this publication is characterised by the ingenuity of its approach – two of the projects have received national recognition – its holistic nature, the fact that it is focused on the needs of individual citizens and that it constantly strives for integration. Enjoy this insight into what it is that CVS do.

Kevin Curley, Chief Executive of NACVS



Kevin Curley



Mike Eastwood

At a time when the whole of voluntary and community sector infrastructure is under intense scrutiny and with an increasing obligation to account for itself, this brochure sets out the CVS' stall. CVS are at the very heart of the voluntary and community sector; they help to hold it together. CVS are also instrumental in bringing organisations across the sectors together. Without CVS, organisations of all shapes and sizes would falter, individuals would miss out on life-changing and enhancing opportunities. Do not underestimate the direct impact that CVS have on lives.

Mike Eastwood, Chair of NACVS



## Newcastle CVS helps to raise £4 million

The range of services offered by CVS naturally varies across the country, with many established in response to local circumstances and need. Some will be offered as part of the CVS' mainstream work; others will be project based.

Fledgling voluntary organisations seeking their first grant, large organisations with failed funding bids and small organisations looking to expand have all turned to Newcastle upon Tyne CVS for funding advice. Louise McGlen runs a telephone advice service and offers face-to-face consultations. She also publishes a monthly newsletter to help local organisations in search of those ever-elusive funds.

### A helping hand

"Often groups come to me after a funding bid has failed. I look at their applications and try to diagnose why it went wrong. Sometimes it is poor planning or budgeting," explains Louise.

The Comfrey Project is celebrating, thanks to Louise. It runs skills training for refugees and asylum seekers. One of its novel approaches was to set up an allotment where people could learn horticultural skills, find out about other services available to them, meet people and enjoy eating the fruits of their labour!

The project wanted to expand its operations, but didn't know how. With Louise's help, they were able to resolve a short-term funding problem and develop a long-term plan. They have now attracted £140,000 of trust funding. Project Co-ordinator, Mandy Jetter, is delighted: "This help enabled us to go from a pilot to a three-year project. With this secure funding we were able to employ a full-time development worker".

The project is now able to run two allotments and promote health and well-being more widely amongst refugees and asylum seekers.

The Patchwork Project, a youth development group operating in a deprived area of Newcastle is another satisfied customer. With Louise's help it raised £109,000 from the Community Fund to grow its operation in an area of high teenage pregnancy, unemployment and drug abuse. The project encourages young people to get involved in decision making.

### Dramatic results

Louise's skills are much in demand. In the past 12 months, she has handled over 300 phone enquiries, distributed newsletters to almost 450 organisations and held over 150 face-to-face sessions. This invaluable service has helped organisations across Newcastle to raise over £4 million in the space of just one year.



## We have the technology

Voluntary Action-Leeds' innovative IT support project, capaciTy, demonstrates how CVS move with the times in providing services. Sadly, it is also experiencing the financial difficulties associated with project funding.

capaciTy was established six years ago with money from the Community Fund to meet a demand, identified by the CVS, for IT support specifically tailored to the needs of the city's voluntary and community sector. When continuation funding was sought after three years, it gained its current name in recognition of the role it had played in building the capacity of the local sector.

### Everything under one roof

capaciTy is a rare example of a project which 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. It has also used its experience to get involved with a number of partnership projects across the city, working with the library service, the City Council and the university.

### Spreading the net

capaciTy also provides a telephone enquiry service, giving local groups advice on a wide range of issues from purchasing and equipment loans to developing new software applications. It has helped groups working with children and young people, Black and minority ethnic communities, older people, mental health service users and homeless people.

Feedback from user groups is excellent. "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",

explained Johanna Mawson at Community Greenspaces.

### The personal touch

capaciTy also provides IT training to the sector, either out of house or in its dedicated IT suite, which was specifically designed to accommodate only six people, to guarantee intensive support for each participant. On average, the project runs two courses a week. In 2003 alone, it trained over 400 individuals and ran 56 one-to-one sessions. One participant commented: "Learnt more about Word and this knowledge will greatly improve my quality of work and save time".

Despite capaciTy's high standing, it is finding it almost impossible to secure long-term funding to ensure its future. If the project is forced to close, where will local groups that rely on technology find a similar level of expertise and understanding of their needs?



## CVS saves shelter in time for Christmas

Sometimes the work of a CVS goes beyond identifying and plugging gaps in local provision. It often means bridging the gap and actually taking on the running of a project.

This was the case last Christmas when homeless people in St. Helen's, Merseyside, were fed and housed thanks to the intervention of their local CVS. In August, the local centre for homeless people had closed its doors for the last time after the charity that ran it folded.

### Centre gets a face-lift

The CVS responded by using its wide ranging contacts to co-ordinate a response that ensured homeless people had a roof over their heads in time for Christmas. A total of 40 volunteers were recruited to keep the centre open and tons of food and clothing were donated. The centre was redecorated by volunteers from the Prince's Trust and local shops provided new carpets. The local authority's

Drugs Action Team played a crucial role, providing start-up funding for a Centre Manager.

As well as the Christmas night shelter, homeless people regained access to evening meals, washing facilities, basic health care and housing advice. On top of this, the CVS raised in excess of £80,000 to provide a range of other services: 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.

### Making a real difference to people's lives

"They were brilliant at Christmas," said Sylvia\*, a homeless mother of two. Since Christmas, centre Manager, Julian Riley, has helped Sylvia to find permanent accommodation, reuniting her with her two children.

CVS Chief Executive, Kate Williams, clarifies: "We knew

we had the knowledge and expertise to assist the setting up of a new charity, and wanted to use our management and financial structures to play a 'holding role' until the new charity developed enough to take full control of its operations".

Julian Riley adds: "It is vital that the service is continued.

Last year, before the centre re-opened, 68 service users joined drug treatment programmes via the centre. The programmes helped them to come off drugs and stop the cycle of stealing in order to pay for their habit. The shelter reaches people who fall through the net, as their coping mechanisms are minimal".

\* Sylvia's name has been changed to protect her identity.



## Young lives transformed

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, in rural County Durham, he is now clean and doing well in his new role.

Gareth enthused: "Volunteering has done more for my lifestyle than I thought possible, and I know for a fact that it has gone a long way in helping me to stay clean. I've met loads of nice people and made new friends. I look forward to volunteering as it's a great way of doing something constructive with my spare time".

He is just one of 200 young people who went through the programme last year. Many of them had similar backgrounds; but with enormous support from the CVS, these young people completed, or even surpassed, 200 hours of volunteering and learned a range of skills.

Alongside this work, the CVS runs basic skills training in literacy and numeracy specifically for young people. Learning is cleverly disguised, in courses aimed at aspiring DJs or pop stars. Specialists who come in to teach the young people about the music industry also introduce them to letter writing and calculating the cost of producing a record.

### By the back door

On other courses, young people receive help in dealing with debt, as they learn to write letters to negotiate paying bills and how to budget, giving them literacy and numeracy skills by the back door. Many of the young people's lives have been transformed and turned around as a direct result of these courses. For the first time, they have been able to show moneylenders the door.

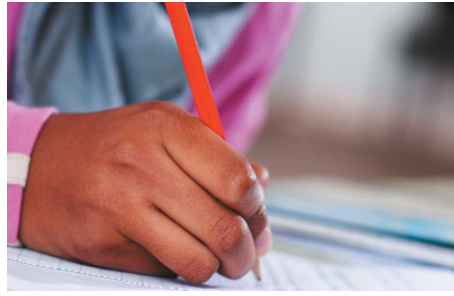
### High investment

In reality, this kind of basic skills training is incredibly labour-intensive, as the students need

so much additional help. This in turn means that numbers are low. Last year 60 people in all completed the course. Hence, the CVS has struggled to justify and fund the work. Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau Chief Officer, Belinda Lewis, explains: "We can't compete with the numbers of students going through mainstream colleges, but we are catering for people who wouldn't manage to stick at a college course without the additional support we offer".

Returning to Gareth, he is a shining example of the power of the values espoused by CVS. Where would he be without the one-to-one attention, the genuine care, the belief in an individual's potential and the social networks provided by the CVS?

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



## Making the connections

CVS are a focal point for local action, aiding communication to ensure high quality services are delivered to those on the ground.

Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Service played a key role in developing and co-ordinating an Older Persons' Voluntary and Community Network. The CVS brought together a range of voluntary and statutory organisations that work with older people across the city, including Age Concern, the primary care trust, befriending services and the Senior Citizens' Forum.

### Bringing the sectors together

Chair of the network, Ian Hay, explains: "Both the statutory and voluntary sectors find the network useful to disseminate information to a wider audience and to receive feedback". By sharing information, the network has the potential to reach thousands of older people – the Senior Citizens' Forum has 6,000 members alone.

The network has an impact beyond its own membership. For example, it has raised awareness of elder abuse and made sure that local groups have access to training provided by statutory services, helping them to deal with this problem.

The network also helps and advises on consultations between the voluntary sector and service providers. It places great emphasis on ensuring that older people are able to represent themselves on local groups. Recently, the network was involved in research by the health service to identify examples of discrimination against older people in the health system.

### Identifying gaps in service

As well as making sure that service providers hear and act on the views of older people, the network identifies gaps and development opportunities in service provision. It is also actively involved in developing

strategies and initiatives for older people. For instance, the network recently offered input into a falls prevention strategy.

### Mutual rewards

Voluntary Sector Development Co-ordinator at Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Service, Fiona Sheaff, explains: "The network has proved very useful in terms of the voluntary and statutory sectors liaising over issues concerning older people and finding out about the services each has to offer".

The CVS adds significant value to the local community, in its widest sense, by identifying and bringing partners to the table who are not natural allies.

The key to good services for local people is ensuring better co-ordination where it matters and the Plymouth experience demonstrates the vital role that CVS play, providing the glue that binds local services together.



## Building networks breaks down barriers

The Olive Tree Project in Exeter builds links between organisations that might not see themselves as natural partners.

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.

### A happy coincidence

By a stroke of good fortune, NACVS and NIACE (the national organisation for adult learning) were rolling out a government programme to support basic skills provision and the CVS made the link. The Exeter Project received funding

in January 2001 and was soon up and running. Exeter CVS took on the role of project manager and helped greatly in developing a rapport between all parties involved. The College provided the tutors and the Islamic Centre publicised the courses, hosted them and provided a crèche.

From these small beginnings, the Olive Tree Project has grown considerably with two further tranches of funding. Its remit has expanded to include the Chinese and Sikh communities, with classes provided in local businesses and homes.

### Enhanced status

With the project's growth came well-deserved recognition for its innovative approach, when it was included as the only voluntary sector-led project in the National ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Pathfinder. New partners were also added into the equation: a voluntary adult education organisation, a language

school, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the Devon and Torbay Learning Partnership and another college.

The project ran until November 2003 in which time its impact was considerable. In just over 12 months the Pathfinder provided English lessons to a total of 485 people across Plymouth and Exeter. It was an important stepping stone for the many asylum seekers who brought professional skills with them, but who lacked language skills. For others, it was a chance to brush up on their language skills, even though they had been in the country for many years.

In addition to enhancing people's career options and social integration, this project has been immensely useful to the CVS in helping to build stronger relationships with the Black and minority ethnic community, particularly in the wake of September 11 and negative publicity around refugees and asylum seekers.



## Putting marginalised communities on the map

The work of a CVS goes way beyond simply speaking up on behalf of local groups. CVS are expert at identifying those whose voice needs to be heard and giving them the confidence and the opportunity to express their own views to the appropriate audience.

On Merseyside, Sefton CVS has worked hard to open lines of communication for the most marginalised and 'hard-to-reach' groups so that they can get their message across to local decision-makers. It has been actively engaged in setting up a number of networks and forums in recent years – including a family support network, a faith forum and a gay, lesbian and bisexual forum.

### Unchartered territory

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 the Network, is full of praise for the

work of the CVS: "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 would simply not have happened without the help of the CVS". Stonewall, the lesbian and gay lobby group, considers the work of Sefton CVS to be at the cutting edge.

The CVS' work 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.

### Further dimensions

Building on this success, Sefton CVS has joined forces with the Sefton Community Empowerment Fund Steering Group to commission a further mapping exercise, this time of Sefton's faith communities. It has also secured funding to support intensive work with the local disabled community.

Kevin Donnellon, Sefton Local Strategic Partnership Disability Network Representative, explains: "Without support and encouragement from the CVS, I genuinely believe that there wouldn't be an effective and proactive disability community in Sefton".

### Partnership pack

As well as enabling marginalised communities to be represented, Sefton CVS has produced an online partnership pack, which provides details on around 50 partnerships in the area and gives the local voluntary and community sector access to information about key decision-makers.

Thanks to Sefton CVS' concerted development work, the local council now includes these networks and forums in its consultation processes.



## Honing sector skills

Being at the centre of the local voluntary and community sector means that CVS are well placed to identify key local issues. It also enables them to concentrate their efforts where they are most needed.

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 didn't meet the funding criteria. The problem appeared to be that the local sector lacked the skills and resources to make use of this opportunity.

### Starting to reverse the trend

Three years ago, Tamworth CVS decided to take a lead on behalf of the community and was successful in obtaining money for three years from the Community Fund. Like Sefton CVS, it started by establishing the context and surveyed the local voluntary and community sector to locate the main sources of funding, client groups, key activities and numbers of staff and volunteers.

Armed with concrete data, the CVS was in a stronger position to represent the needs of the sector to the local strategic partnerships, local authorities and other funders. It also brought together major funders from across the region to get a better understanding of why funding bids were failing, and organised a series of workshops where individual funders were able to help groups wishing to bid. Building on this momentum, the CVS held a highly successful funders' fair.

### Bearing fruit

One of the groups to receive help from the CVS' project is the Riverside Toy Library which was recently successful in securing £50,000 from the Community Fund and acknowledged the CVS' part in this as essential: "The support and encouragement in preparing the bid were key," said co-ordinator Ann Riches.

In turn, the toy library has had a huge impact on local people. They were queuing up to sing its praises: "The toy library is a great facility for children to

choose toys carefully and to look after other people's property".

Park Farm Youth Group is another local project to see real benefits from the intervention of the CVS. It secured funding to buy a computer and learning package for young people, providing the only access to a computer for many of them.

### High praise

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 applications 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".



## CVS creates a web of partnerships

Working in partnership at a strategic level is now a central part of the work of a CVS.

### Adding another dimension

Learning in the Community (LiNC) is a South London-wide partnership that brings together the CVS in Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond and Sutton to deliver informal learning in community settings. The project's reach is vastly expanded by each of the CVS teaming up with local agencies – such as Mind, Age Concern, youth offending teams and housing associations – and plugging into their networks. This three-dimensional approach is proving highly effective in locating and meeting the needs of people who wouldn't normally set foot inside the local college.

Each CVS has a grants pot to enable local organisations to commission learning tailored to the needs of local people. In Merton, 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.

### Expanding programmes

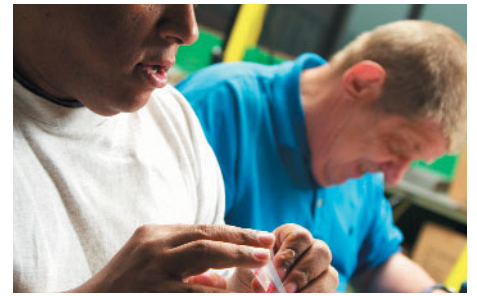
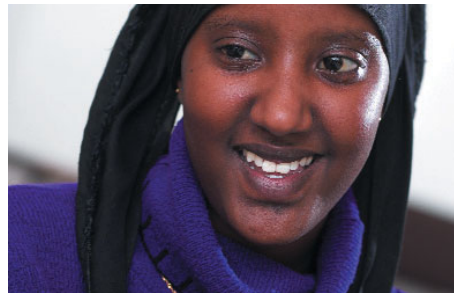
Kingston Voluntary Action recruited more than 100 people between January and August 2003 to learn skills as diverse as web design, job interview skills, first aid, languages and confidence building. "My confidence has improved since doing the training. Being around other people . . . contributed to me being able to listen to others," said Chris, who attended the job interview skills course.

Because of its community focus, LiNC has had to address some of the key barriers to learning –

language and literacy needs, childcare and transport issues have all been overcome. One course for single parents has proved to be a fantastic stepping stone, with 85% of participants choosing to continue their learning, despite the barriers they face. Kingston VA alone has seen six learners enter full-time education, eight take on paid part-time work, 19 engage in voluntary work and 16 complete accredited learning.

To add to these achievements, 12 learners with mental health issues have participated in learning and the biggest success of all: eight young people who had been involved with drugs or alcohol have been helped into work.

LiNC is funded by the local Learning and Skills Council for two years, but the CVS have tasted such incredible success, they are determined LiNC should continue.



## Power to the people

### Words matched by actions

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. Every year it identifies which of the partnerships operating in the city are key to its regeneration agenda and ensures that local people, nominated through local voluntary and community organisations, make their voices, experiences, and those of their own communities, heard at the decision-making table.

Its policy statement on representation states: ". . . that the regeneration of communities requires direction and action at grass roots level by the people who are most affected". These are not mere words; Voscur is actively seeking sustainable outcomes, rather than quick fixes, and to pull in expertise from some of the 500 local groups which are its members.

Local people identified through this finely tuned system now represent local needs on the Bristol Partnership (Bristol's Local Strategic Partnership); the West of England Strategic Partnership; the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership; the Children and Young People's Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership, amongst others. Between them, representatives have made a major contribution to these partnerships, taking a lead in voicing concerns which have resulted in the redrafting of budgets, restructuring of the LSP and a greater say for the voluntary and community sector in the way money is spent on education.

### Sending out ripples

As well as working through individual representatives, Voscur has also taken a more corporate stand on certain issues. When the Community Plan was being developed,

Voscur spearheaded a campaign to ensure that female voices from across Bristol were heard and bore influence on its development and outcomes.

A whole project was formed to capture women's voices on education, employment, health, environment and developing local communities, which culminated in a major event. Information gathered through each of the project's strands was analysed and prioritised on the day and handed over to be integrated into the Community Plan.

Voscur's efforts to help make local people's voices heard has already been felt in the decision-making chambers of the city. Voscur, and other CVS across the country, are determined to expand on this role, to ensure that local people have their say.



## What is a CVS?

A Council for Voluntary Service is a voluntary organisation which is set up, owned and run by local groups to develop, support and promote the local voluntary and community sector. CVS support their members by providing them with a range of services and by acting as a voice for the local voluntary and community sector.

Usually funded by the local authority and other local statutory agencies, there is a CVS working in almost every district and city in England.

Individual CVS differ in character and size, although they usually work to the same geographical boundaries as the local authority. They also differ in name. Many are called CVS, while others might be called Voluntary Action or Voluntary Sector Council.

While the characteristics, history and even name of individual

CVS may differ from place to place, they share the same purpose and values. All CVS support, promote and develop local voluntary and community action through a number of key activities: services and support; development work; liaison; representation and strategic partnerships.

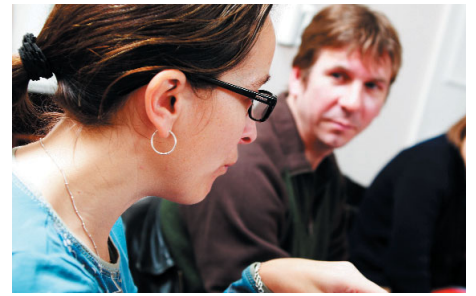
### What is NACVS?

NACVS is the growing network of over 300 CVS across England. NACVS supports CVS with information and advice; networking and learning opportunities; and support and development.

By drawing on CVS' experience, NACVS contributes to national policy and acts as a national voice for the local voluntary and community sector. We also work closely with other national organisations to ensure a co-ordinated approach to national policy development.

Research has shown that the average CVS has over 185 members, and is in contact with over 400 local organisations. With a membership spread across urban and rural areas of England, we can reach in excess of 180,000 local groups.

NACVS' work is guided by values that encompass equality of opportunity, participation, co-operation and democratic involvement. In supporting the voluntary and community sector, we help in combating poverty and disadvantage, and improving the quality of life for communities, groups and individuals.



## CVS across the country

Since NACVS became an independent association in 1991, our membership has grown from 200 to 285 CVS across England, with an additional 64 associates, including 36 CVS working towards membership.

	Members	Associates
 East Midlands	26	9
 East of England	34	9
 London	29	4
 North East	20	4
 North West	39	4
 South East	54	11
 South West	27	10
 West Midlands	29	6
 Yorkshire & Humber	27	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>64</b>





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If you would like to get in touch with any of these CVS, or others across England, you can find details on NACVS' website at: [www.nacvs.org.uk/cvsdir](http://www.nacvs.org.uk/cvsdir)

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National Association of  
Councils for Voluntary Service  
Arundel Court  
177 Arundel Street  
Sheffield S1 2NU

Tel 0114 278 6636  
Fax 0114 278 7004  
Textphone 0114 278 7025  
nacvs@nacvs.org.uk  
www.nacvs.org.uk



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