



**Voluntary Action
Vale Royal**

annual report 08



**Voluntary Action
Vale Royal**

Registered Office
Waterside House, Navigation Road,
Northwich CW8 1BE

Charity Registration number 1112525
Company Registration number 5615626



President Lord Ashbrook

The Board

Chair Moira Chapman

Vice Chair Julia Cooper (Whitley Parish Council)

Treasurer Yvonne Wood

Other Members

Shielagh Abbott	(Cotswold House Project)
John Alexander	Townbridge Residents Association
Anne Boyd	(Co-opted) from June 2008
George Brand	(Grange Residents
Lynne Hamlett	Connexions)
Brian Jamieson	(Trailblazers)
David Ling	(Winsford Education Partnership)
	until February 2008
Clr Brian Lloyd	(Co-opted) until May 2008
Clr George Mainwaring	(Co-opted)
Bob Mather	(Co-opted)
Jill McQuaid	(Winsford Youth Forum)
Charlie Simmons	(Older People's Network)

MISSION STATEMENT

Voluntary Action Vale Royal exists to promote and support voluntary organisations and to encourage voluntary activity for the benefit of the local community as a whole and for disadvantaged groups and individuals

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Staff

Northwich

Arthur Neil	Chief Executive
Tracey Walford	Deputy Chief Executive
Caroline Jamieson	Direct Payments and Payroll service
Trish Toone	New Deal Coordinator
Sue Robinson	New Deal Coordinator
Pete Marsden	New Deal and Adult Learning Support
Ian Hadley	New Deal support worker
Frank Garstang	Finance Assistant
Phyllis Blease	Office Cleaner
David Hennessey	Grants Officer (until March 2008)
Jacquie Ledward	Adult and Community Learning Manager
Angeli Dharwar	Admin and Support Tutor
Jackie Ellison	Community Development Worker
Kelly Egerton	Family Link Worker(until May 2008)
Liz Wood	Family Link Worker

Winsford

Carol Halpin	Support Worker
Sally Brough	Support Worker
Ursula Evans	Tutor/assessor
Julie Stahl	Home School Mentor
Lynne Southern	Home School Mentor
Theresa Whalley	Family Support Worker (until August 2008)
Fay Jones	Family Support Worker
Joanne Stoneley	Family Support Worker

Warrington New Deal

Kate Massey	New Deal Coordinator
April Done	New Deal Support Worker

Chairman's Foreword

It is now one year since I took over as the chairman of Voluntary Action Vale Royal and I can honestly say that it has been one of challenge and opportunity. The most significant challenge to face the organisation was the decision to reorganise local government in Cheshire. This will see the removal of District and County governance in Cheshire, to be replaced by the unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC). The implication for VAVR is that the three Districts, which provide the administrative boundaries for three organisations providing infrastructure support to the third sector, will be replaced by the single boundary of CWAC, which at some stage will be looking towards having a single organisation to provide this support.

As would be expected, VAVR has faced this challenge head on and viewed it as an opportunity for development. This has manifested itself in three ways. The first action was to work towards the establishment of a Third Sector Assembly for Cheshire West. The lead for the Assembly has been the Chief Executive at VAVR, even down to the commissioning of a new logo! The Assembly will provide a voice for the third sector in Cheshire West, and based on the principle that collective voices are stronger than single voices, it has got off to both a professional and successful start, with indications that the public sector support and endorse this collective approach.

The second response has been an exploration of the paths that the organisation can take with regard to how it provides directly delivered services. VAVR has a proud history of delivering services designed to promote social inclusion, and is indeed different from the other two support organisations in Cheshire West, in that a high percentage of its operating cost is from such service delivery, rather than funding for third sector support costs. This places VAVR in a strong position for the future, and 2007/08 has seen consolidation of existing services whilst continuing to seek new opportunities.

The third response has been to work with Chester Voluntary Action and EPNAVCO (the CVS for Ellesmere Port and Neston) in order to plan a way forward with regard to how we can be best placed as a partnership to continue to provide third sector support across the CWAC area. Again I am delighted that VAVR has faced this challenge head on and has worked hard towards developing a collective response.

VAVR has risen to the challenge with enthusiasm and commitment. It has had a successful year, it has provided excellent support to the third sector, it has delivered against all targets and it has been financially managed with integrity and probity. None of this could have been achieved without the dedication and professionalism of all the staff and it is appropriate to finish this forward by offering my appreciation of all their hard work, both on behalf of the Board and all those people and organisations who have benefited from their support in the past year.

Moira Chapman

A year of challenge and achievement

Key Achievements 2007-2008

- Renewed contract for Adult and Community Learning
- Contract extended for New Deal until 2009
- Top of the league tables for job outcomes January - March 2008 for Cheshire and Warrington
- Children's Fund project extended until 2009
- New Learning Centre at Waterside House
- Additional training facilities for New Deal trainees
- Became ASDAN recognised centre for key skills
- Top grade for ECDL service (European Computer Driving License)
- Successful Investors in People review
- Secured contract with 'nextstep' for information and advice provision
- Worked with partners to establish the Third Sector Assembly Cheshire West
- Web site updated
- Taste of Hospitality course launched
- A-Z of Volunteering Opportunities produced
- Community Learning facility set up at Lostock Community Centre
- New Family Support service started
- Invited to submit full bid to Big Lottery for Family Learning

CVS Core Services

1. providing support services such as training, information and advice
2. identifying new needs and developing initiatives to meet those needs
3. encouraging liaison between local groups and with other agencies
4. enabling representation
5. Strategic partnership working

A large part of our work in these areas is delivered through the Voluntary Sector Forum, the quarterly newsletter and regular emails

Voluntary Sector Forum

The Forum is a useful vehicle for engagement between the statutory and third sectors. During the last year we have had a regular programme of member organisations giving presentations on their work to other members. This has not only been interesting and informative but has often led to offers of help or useful introductions.

We have been pleased to have presentations from JobcentrePlus as well as the Primary Care Trust, Cheshire County Council and the Big Lottery.

The Forum has benefitted greatly from input from local authorities and we'd especially like to thank Fiona Dunning, Strategic Partnerships Manager at Vale Royal for her support and for keeping the sector informed on the Community Plan, area working and many other issues.

Newsletter

The newsletter is sent out quarterly to all our members and is also posted on our website. We try to keep the content interesting and to present it attractively and encourage local groups to publicise their events and opportunities in it. Over 100 organisations and networks - not all of them members - receive copies of the newsletter and other 'news flashes' via email.

Training

VAVR has hosted numerous training sessions run by the training project at Congleton CVS and we have made people aware of a wide range of training opportunities via Learning Together Cheshire and Warrington.

We hosted two sessions on Outcomes training for eight local groups earlier in the year, which was delivered by the Chief Officer of Halton Voluntary Action. In September 2008 we are arranging training for managers on appraisals.



Funding

We have a useful funding page on our website www.vavaleroyal.org.uk/funding and we also forward the funding newsletter prepared by our colleagues at EPNAVCO (the Ellesmere Port and Neston CVS.)

We regularly advise members on where to seek funding and have offered help completing forms.

We administer the small grants funds on behalf of Vale Royal Borough Council and -from September 2008 - for Western Cheshire Primary Care Trust. In the 2007-8 financial year we distributed over £9000 to 21 small local groups.

We also distributed funds across Cheshire and Warrington as part of the Community Champions project and in Vale Royal, Ellesmere Port and Neston and Warrington as part of the Positive Learning Fund. Both of these funds ended in March 2008.

Payroll and Direct Payments

We offer a cost effective payroll service for several local organisations, and to over 150 individuals using the Direct Payments scheme. Payments can be arranged weekly or monthly taking all the hassle out of the payroll side of being an employer.

Equipment

We have several items of equipment which local groups can borrow or use on our premises. These include photocopier, laminator, shredder, lap top and projector, display screens.

Supporting local groups

We provide ongoing support and short term interventions for groups at various stages in their development. So it can be helping them to get started, helping them to keep going and helping them not to go under.

During the year we've been offering support to a range of organisations including Greenbank Residents, Community Partners Cheshire, Lostock Community Centre, Vale Royal Playschemes and many more.



**New era,
new challenges,
new opportunities**

The establishment of a unitary Council for Cheshire West undertaking all the services previously provided by the County and District Councils provides new opportunities for joined up thinking... and more importantly joined up working.

The Assembly is a new partnership developed by the three Councils for Voluntary Service in Chester, Ellesmere Port & Neston and Vale Royal in partnership with organisations like Age Concern Cheshire, Groundwork, Vale Royal Disability Services, Churches Together, CHaWREC and the Citizens' Advice Bureaux.

The Assembly's Aims

- To ensure that the voice of the local voluntary community and faith sector is heard
- To develop better ways of supporting small organisations
- To help all organisations who are interested to access resources - whether for their own work or to help deliver public services
- To promote better understanding of what we all do and to promote more partnership working

A launch event at the Fourways in April saw the Assembly idea well received by representatives of the statutory sector and the proposals have been supported by all three local networks.

The steering group continues to meet under the Chairmanship of Jane Staley, Executive Director of Groundwork Cheshire with Hilda Yarker of Cheshire Community Voice as Vice Chair and Arthur Neil as Secretary.

CVS in Cheshire West

Traditionally Councils for Voluntary Service have had boundaries co-terminous with the local authority. In April 2009 we will have one authority and three CVS.

It is likely that infrastructure services like those we provide will be subject to tender and be awarded to a single provider from April 2010. This presents a challenge for the CVS in the three current districts to develop a new approach if they are to secure funding to provide these services.



New Futures

In July our Board approved a report from the Chief Executive which proposed a major review of our capacity and potential for expansion in order to continue to develop our project work with local people and families.

We are keen to build on our successes in this area and to become a significant third sector provider of services which address worklessness and financial and social exclusion.

Inclusion, inclusion, inclusion!

Although Voluntary Action Vale Royal delivers a number of services - Adult Learning, Family Support, Direct Payments, New Deal - they are all linked by the organisation's long standing commitment to help people who might otherwise feel 'left out'. Likewise our approach to many core CVS services has always placed an emphasis on ensuring that small organisations get a chance and have access to the resources and knowledge they need.

For individuals in the community knowledge, access to services, personal confidence, personal empowerment and building skills are all essentials if we are to reduce exclusion and help people to take part in our community.

The next few pages our project managers write about the activities and services which they lead.



Adult and Community Learning

This Report covers the period from 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2008

Target enrolments	250
Actual	331 (216 Northwich, 115 Winsford)

The project continues to be both popular and successful. Learners are giving very positive feedback as well as working towards qualifications. This year's achievements include:

- Overall grade 2 (good) for teaching across ACL.
- Grade A for ECDL.
- Direct Certification for ASDAN Key Skills Qualifications.
- All ACL teaching staff and volunteers hold a recognised teaching qualification.
- All ACL teaching staff registered with the Institute for Learning (IfL).
- Pilot Centre for Functional Skills.
- 63 learners registered to do OCN qualifications ranging from Literacy - Writing for Meaning, Practical Spelling, Speaking and Listening, Getting Started Webwise, Powerpoint, Spreadsheets, Computing for Beginners, Introduction to Volunteering, Using Email and Childcare.
- 50 enrolments on the ECDL courses (including tasters) and 78 modules have been successfully achieved.
- Two learners registered with ASDAN key skills in Communication.
- One learner achieved a Key Skills Test in Communication at Level 1.
- Two learners achieved a National test, one in Literacy Level 1 and one at Numeracy Level 2.
- Various tasters have been completed ranging from Internet and Email, job search, CV writing and Introduction into Child Care.
- 6 learners have passed the Functional Skills Pilot qualification in ICT ranging from Entry 2 to Level 1.
- VAVR learner first in country to achieve ADSAN's Functional Skills Pilot qualification in ICT Entry 2.

I would also like to thank Support Tutors, Angie Dharwar, Pete Marsden and volunteers Angela Janion and Alan Rolfe for all their hard work. And finally thanks once again to Carol Halpin and the team at Winsford.

Jacque Ledward
Adult and Community Learning Manager

New Deal

Voluntary Action Vale Royal is now entering its tenth year of delivering New Deal in Vale Royal, and, since April 2006, in the Warrington area as well.

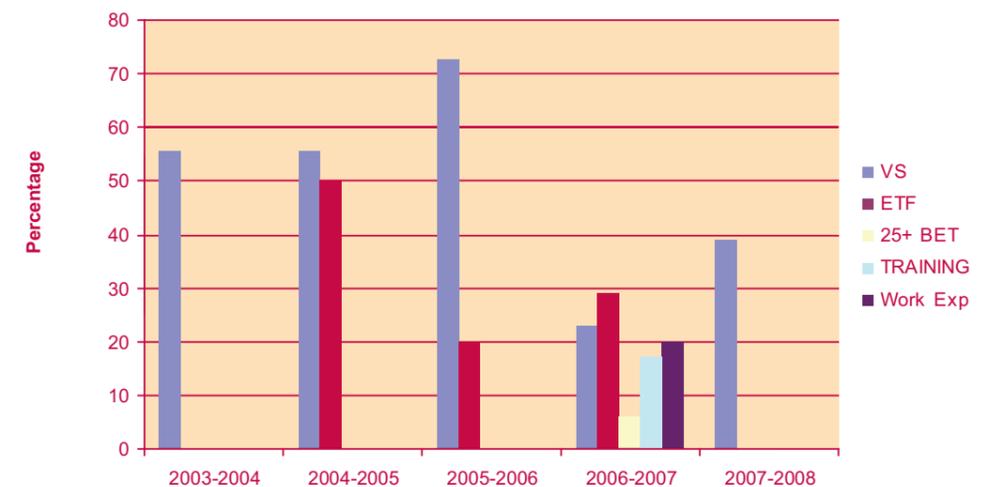
We continue to offer eight options designed to help those aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for 6 months or more, and those aged 25+ and 50+ who have been unemployed for 18 months or more, back into suitable employment. We do this via a number of means;

- training and learning,
- work placements,
- mentoring,
- confidence building
- personal and practical support,
- on-going jobsearch help and advice on a weekly basis.

From April 2007 to March 2008 we had a total of 164 referrals, the majority being male and many lacking recent or indeed any experience of the labour market.

Motivating, inspiring and building the confidence of our trainees is very challenging and requires a diverse range of skills and experience. Securing suitable employment can be a long journey for many and doesn't happen overnight. A lot of time and energy is invested in each individual to help them achieve their job and learning goals within the limited timescales. A big thank you to all the staff who continue to remain committed to working on the project, your skills and experience are appreciated.

Job Outcome Rates 2003 - 2008



During March 2008 we were top of the league with our Job Outcomes for the month and cumulatively for the period Jan- March for Cheshire and Warrington which is an excellent result !

Qualifications

The Training Routeway and Basic Employability Training option referrals are required to achieve qualifications. The other options we provide do not include a compulsory training element. However, we have always ensured that anyone, regardless of referral status, is offered the opportunity to undertake some form of training should they wish to do so, and it fits with their job goals and / or gives them transferable skills.

All option completers have achieved qualifications, and many achieved these before their specified end dates.

Across all the options over 80% of completers achieved some form of recognised qualification. Many thanks to our New Deal tutor Ursula Evans.

Placements

We have over 75 work placement arrangements with local voluntary organisations and employers, offering a wide variety of experience and opportunities. Without their help and support we would struggle to provide our trainees with suitable work experience. So a huge thank you to all those involved, we appreciate the challenges you have to deal with on a daily basis and we couldn't do it without you!

Some of our placement providers have employed trainees after their period on New Deal, having built up a working relationship over the placement time, and seen their standard of work. The most popular occupational areas remain Retail and Warehousing.

New Futures for Real People

Statistics only tell part of the story. Here's one true story and a poem from one of our Warrington trainees

'Joe' came to us at the age of 39 having had a long gap in his work record due to having been detained at her Majesty's pleasure.

He did not want to be on the option and informed us on the first day that we would never find work for him because of his background.

We worked hard with him to strengthen his confidence and we were fortunate enough to find him a work placement with a local car parts organisation. He settled in very well with the team and gradually felt he was contributing to the business. As he could drive he was permitted to drive the company van eventually and became an asset to the team. When it came to the end of his placement the employer wanted to keep him on and offered him a permanent position.

'Joe' is still enjoying his work and feels he has been given a new lease of life.

Poem written by Elspeth (Aged 55), trainee at Warrington, to express how she felt about New Deal and her experience as a whole.

Coordinators

Who are they! What do they do?
Ladies and gentleman let me introduce you.
Kate and April are their names
Evaluation is their game
Pride and joy for all to gain.

Take life in their hands that's for sure
Don't know what's going to walk through the door,
Is it life or not, Kate and April will work it out
Male or female life won't be grim.

Be it slick or grim, this course has begun
To the computers one and all
Let's show the world we're in control
Do IT and learn the course, look for a job not the worse.
Bosses will think twice they're not lazy down and outs,
They've took a course with pride and joy, they've worked it out.
Their tutors must be proud their smiling with no clouds.
Just pure sunshine all around.

Let's be grateful to Kate and April are around,
We'll get a job and make them proud.
If not we will be down.
Hat's off guys and smile
Three cheers for these girls.
HIP" HIP" Hooray we'll do our best.

A Taste of Hospitality

In June we had our first learners on a two week programme we had devised in collaboration with Business After Hours and JobcentrePlus. A Taste of Hospitality is designed to offer a range of generic skills for those looking for work in reception, catering, care or hotel work. Sessions include team work and customer care plus work experience and accredited courses on health and safety and food hygiene.



Family Support

Every Child Matters states that every child, whatever their background or circumstances, should have the support they need to: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic wellbeing

The family support project currently operates within nine primary schools across Northwich and Winsford and one high school in Winsford. The aim of the project is to reduce or prevent social exclusion in identified areas of deprivation. Funding has now been granted for another year taking us up to March 2009.

Being based at local schools gives us the opportunity to work within the community and with local families who may be experiencing difficulties such as debt, housing issues, relationship issues or behavioural problems to name just a few.

We receive referrals from schools or parents and meet with the family either at home, school or the local children's centre to enable the family to speak openly about any issues they may have. From this we will plan a route of action, which may involve referrals to external agencies such as CABx or Social Care. We will then support the family through appointments or act a mentor to them. Alongside this we will work with any child within the school with issues they may have such as behaviour or bullying. We aim to work on improving the relationships between schools and families while encouraging families to engage with and take ownership of their school and the community as a whole. We work at increasing the aspirations of the families we work with by promoting adult and family learning and signposting to other support services in the community.

Within the last year we:

- Worked with 490 children of which 23% had special educational needs and 7% were disabled
- Delivered two Webster Stratton parenting courses in Winsford with a total of 22 parents completing the course including one lone male parent.
- Completed four Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs), with us being the lead profession in one assessment.
- Engaged 17 children in sustainable out of school activities such as Rugby, Football and St John's Ambulance.
- Encouraged and supported parents to enrol into adult education.
- Assisted in the organising and delivering of family learning sessions within three primary schools.
- Delivered one parenting course in Northwich where eight parents completed the course.
- Helped in planning and promoting community days within two schools
- We ran a transition group for identified vulnerable children moving to high school.
- We run monthly drop ins with the school nurse in various schools
- We are involved in the new neighbourhood house in Cotebrook Road Rudheath where we run a drop in facility to offer advice and guidance.
- We have built upon our already good relationships with external agencies and will continue to focus on this to enable to offer the best service to our users.

Alongside this we also attend multi agency meetings, assist in attendance issues, attended parents evenings, liaise with agencies and services on families' behalf and promote inclusion of the community in local events.

In January this year we began another project to work alongside the family support project in Winsford. This concentrates on a child's attendance and punctuality at school, as we know poor attendance can have a detrimental effect on a child's education. Our three Family Support Workers are based within five schools within Winsford and work closely with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). As with the family support project this is a preventative role and we offer help and support to families who may be experiencing difficulties in getting their child in to school. From morning calls and first day response we will hopefully prevent legal action being taken. We will offer short term lifts to children while working with the family to sort out the issues possibly referring to external agencies or to our family support project. We are pleased to say that this project has been very successful and we have secured funding for a further year.

A child's attendance may drop for a variety of reasons below are a few common issues we come across:

School Issues

- Bullying
- Underachievement
- Curriculum
- Friendships

Personal Reasons

- Health
- Emotional well being
- Self esteem
- Bedtime routines
- Morning routines

Family Circumstances

- Housing
- Financial
- Transport
- Childcare

One example of our intervention at a primary school shows a consistent reduction of numbers in children with attendance issues over 3 months. The attendance benchmark for Cheshire is 95%. If below 80% the EWO will become involved and may issue a fixed penalty notice.

	No of pupils below 90% attendance	No of pupils below 80% attendance	No of pupils below 70% attendance
Feb 2008	68	10	6
Mar 2008	45	8	4
April 2008	39	7	3

I would like to thank the Family Link and Family Support workers for remaining positive and focused when funding was uncertain I feel this shows what a dedicated team we are and I believe that what we are achieving really does make a difference.

Sam's story

'Sam' was referred to us as his youngest daughter would not attend nursery the outcome of our visit with him identified the following:

He is a lone male parent with 4 children, 1 female and 3 male aged 3,5,7 and 9. He didn't have parental responsibility of the children and they had sporadic contact from their mum. He had no close family support and limited community support the family also lived in over crowded conditions

'Sam' was bought up in Local Authority care, he had limited literacy and numeracy skills but did have a work history at the moment being on benefits.

Actions

- Referral made to Sure Start and health visitor..
- Involved school nurse for medical checks.
- Engaged 'Sam' and supported him in visits to a solicitor now with court proceeding to gain parental responsibility and residence order for the children.
- Encouraged 'Sam' to seek support from social care for his daughter.
- Engaged him with Richmond Fellowship due to his own problems of anxiety.
- Oldest boy attended a transition group for high school run by us.
- Dad attended parenting course run by us and gave a good evaluation of it.
- We supported him in sorting out his rent and TV arrears.
- We intervened and supported 'Sam' when he had a vet's bill of just over £800 - he was going to use a door step lender for the cash. We spoke on his behalf to the vet who eventually agreed to weekly payment -something they wouldn't normally do.
- We sourced and provided school uniform for all four children when they had to move school due to closure.

Outcome

- Completed parenting course
- Read his first book (A child called IT)
- Taken on full responsibility of paying his bills
- Agreed to Richmond Fellowship and is working on his own mental health issues.
- Volunteering in his local primary school.
- All children, now fully engaging within school.
- Door step loan to be paid off in 4 weeks giving 'Sam' an extra £100 per week.
- Appointment made with credit union for then to open saving account.

Jackie Ellison
Community Development Manager

