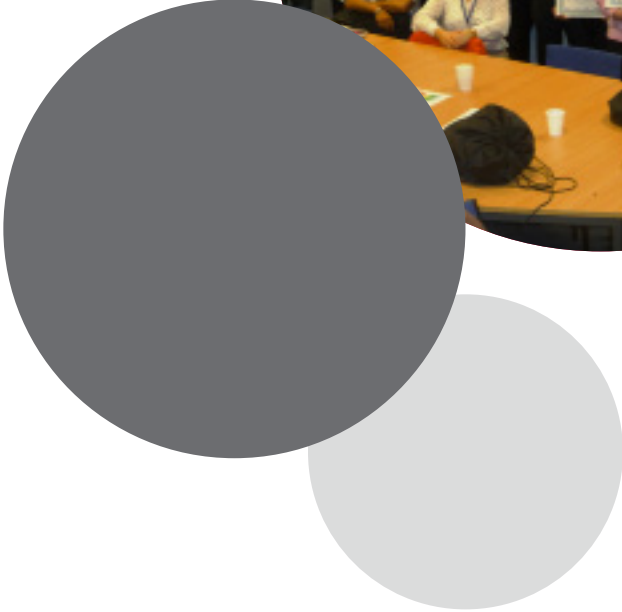


# A Quick Guide to The Role of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector in Public health



August 2011



## Guide to the Role of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors in Public Health at a Glance

This guide has been created to give councillors and public health professionals an overview of the role and impact the voluntary, community and faith sectors play in public health.

The 2010 Marmot Review 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives' reported on the stark reality of health inequality and measures in England "the many people who are dying prematurely each year as a result of health inequalities would otherwise have enjoyed, in total, between 1.3 and 2.5 million extra years of life". Within the nine key messages of the report are the statements that "Action on health inequalities requires action across all the social determinants of health" and that "Delivering these policy objectives will require action by central and local government, the NHS, the third and private sectors and community groups. National policies will not work without effective local delivery systems focussed in health equity in all policies".

The term 'Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector' encompasses all not-for-profit voluntary, community and faith groups, organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals, large and small.

The Marmot report identifies the need to work across the broad determinants of health inequality and identifies the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) also referred to as 'the third sector', as a key partner in this work. Whilst there are many hundreds of VCFS organisations involved directly in health provision services, the sector also works across and engages with the community in all the areas of health determinants e.g. employment, community cohesion, education, housing, welfare, alcohol and substance misuse, poverty, debt, disability etc.

## What do we mean by Community?

A community can be defined in many ways, more commonly it applies geographically or to a group with common interests e.g. a housing estate, ward, womens groups, pensioners groups, minority groups, religious and cultural groups. More often people themselves determine which community they associate with.

- a group of people linked in some way through residence, interest, demographic characteristic, profession, age, membership of an organisation or other defining characteristic to which the person does or could identify with psychologically, and where there are actual or potential linkages of a positive kind between the people concerned (Raeburn and Rootman 1994)

## What do we mean by Self Help Group?

Self help groups provide a forum for people who share similar experiences to come together to offer practical and emotional support for mutual benefit. Generally self help groups are the first source of information and advice and then move on. Self help groups provide support to people who are facing a change in their life and are finding their changed circumstances difficult to cope with, for example:

- the onset of a long-term medical condition
- dealing with addiction
- family conflict



## **What do we mean by Community Organisation?**

Community organisations operate within a local community with a common purpose of bringing benefit to its location and membership. They are often run on a voluntary basis and are self financed.

## **What do we mean by Registered Charity?**

These are voluntary organisations which provide goods and services that have a legal format and are governed by special tax status. The governance structure is through the Charity Commission.

Registered charities have a number of operational structures: they can be an unincorporated association, a trust or a company limited by guarantee. Each of these has a different governance structure. Larger voluntary organisations that have good business models are likely to become a charity in order to develop its business through employing staff.

## **What do we mean by Social Enterprise?**

Social enterprises are organisation / businesses providing goods and services for social and environmental purposes. Their key purpose is to accomplish a social goal through re-investing the profits of the business back into the sustainability of the business.



## What is the Contribution of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector to Health and Wellbeing

VCFS groups and organisations are a significant infrastructure for health and social welfare and they contribute an enormous amount to the health status of the whole population. They do this through their activities, influence and direct grassroot involvement with people who have common agenda and concerns. Community participation in health is very important to achieve health improvement.

Community participation is an enabler for a number of key issues. For example:

- \* **Empowerment:-** Allows those members of the target group who are most likely to be excluded from decision making processes, to develop their skills, knowledge and experience and have a greater and more productive influence in the decisions affecting their lives.
- \* **Equality:-** Enables the targeting of socio-economic, disadvantaged, vulnerable or isolated groups. It helps to set up mechanisms where open access can be achieved by not heavily relying on established voluntary groups.
- \* **Recording community views:-** Untapping and recording the views and concerns of communities which traditionally can sometimes be omitted in planning procedures meaning that long term policies and strategies fall short in meeting the wider needs of the community.
- \* **Networking:-** Facilitates the formation of groups, networks, agencies and both internal/external support structures within communities themselves. In return this provides a useful resource in promoting, disseminating and supporting local initiatives.
- \* **Ownership:-** Encouraging individuals to make their own decisions which achieves more realistic results when compared to decisions being made by others on behalf of a community.

## Developing Community Assets – Case Study

In order to encourage individuals and communities to take on their responsibility for individual and community behaviour change the VCFS and particularly Lancashire Associations for Councils for Voluntary Service have adopted and been the lead in designing local community development approaches such as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). This approach engages, motivates and facilitates individuals, associations and institutions to identify, map and utilise the resources, assets, capacities and skills available to them to improve social capacity and community cohesion as well as economic and health and wellbeing outcomes. The approach supports individuals to become less dependent on services and achieve a higher level of civil participation within and for their communities. Many VCFS organisations also work closely with hard to reach groups, providing better access to individuals who may otherwise be missed.

The sector also enables community members to participate, particularly through volunteering, in positive activities that can reduce isolation, improve wellbeing and have a range of other health benefits.

## A VCFS Infrastructure network enables:

- Engaging and representation of VCFS to health commissioners;
- Cascading of emerging local health information into VCFS organisations;
- Supporting participation in health consultations to VCFS organisations and local communities;
- Ensuring Clinical commissioning groups meet the required principle of “beginning to build good relationships with others including the local authority, voluntary and community sector organisations”;
- Providing a single communication pathway into the VCFS;
- Coordinating health related training to increase the capacity of the VCFS on health and care issues;
- Provision of signposting and support to services;
- Development and provision of health projects and services;
- Promoting volunteering and community activities;
- Working with and providing access to hard to reach groups regarding health and care issues.

The VCFS are well positioned and capable to provide non clinical services for communities and groups and should form part of the future commissioning agenda. When commissioning services VCFS should be considered as an equal partner in the market place and be given equal opportunity to bid for services.

## Useful Links

Further information on ABCD can be accessed via West Lancashire CVS website [www.wlcvs.org/community-development.html](http://www.wlcvs.org/community-development.html)

# Talk to us

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<https://northwestemployers.6connex.com/portal/northwestconnex/login>

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Health Terminology	Health Inequalities
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Health Reform	Health Champions
The Role of VCFS in Public Health	

