

5<sup>th</sup> March 2015

**REPORT OF WASHINGTON AREA COMMUNITY VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORK**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the Washington Area Community and Voluntary Sector Network.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 To develop the capacity and influence of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) across the City, Area Networks have been established and delegates represent each Area Network at Area Committee taking forward issues on behalf of the whole VCS in the area and reporting back, providing a two-way flow of communication. The Washington VCS Network, in partnership with the Area Committee, facilitates monthly meetings where VCS organisations meet together to consider shared matters of interest and to provide support collectively.
- 2.2 Washington has an extremely active VCS which delivers services to residents throughout the town. In Washington the VCS is made up of a wide range of organisations ranging from independent local branches of national charities through to small, totally voluntary, community groups. Collectively these organisations provide Washington residents with a wide range of local services, activities and opportunities and have a significant role within community life here. This report contains a range of case studies which both demonstrate the diversity of the VCS organisations operating in Washington and the range of services and support they provide, highlighting how they make a difference to residence lives.
- 2.3 For the purpose of this meeting, and mirroring the Area Committee's timescales with regard to presenting an annual report re achievement, this Network Report will present the Washington Network's Annual Review for Member's consideration.

**3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 Members are requested
- To note the contents of the report attached as Annex 1

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## Washington Area VCS Network Annual Report 2014 - 15

The Washington VCS Network plays an important role in terms of supporting groups and organisations operating within the area and by providing a structured process for the sector to engage with Washington Area Committee and other partners. The network is part of a structured relationship with the Area Committee by means of the elected Network Representatives who have compiled this report.

The VCS Network has collected a range of case studies which it is felt demonstrate the wide range of activity the sector is delivering in Washington. For the purposes of this report real life examples of the work of the sector have been collected and are included below. Members of the Washington Area Committee are requested to note that the case studies below are only a small part of the overall VCS activity within the town.

### **Case Study No.1: Apextra**

Main client/target group: Parents, guardians, carers, and unemployed people and those with no qualifications or below a level 2.

Through their work in schools Apextra has received very positive feedback from head teachers relating to parental involvement in school life, supporting their children's educational development and an increase in parent and child confidence, self-esteem and relationships with school in general. One example of this is through a contract that they hold with FACL for family learning FEML (Family English Maths and Language). Apextra planned to deliver a 12 week programme at Blackfell Primary School enabling the group to design, develop and then publish a book to celebrate Washington 50. They were also able to access extra funding from the Washington 50 fund, that ensured all primary aged children attending Washington schools and nurseries received a copy.

The families that participated in the project increased their research skills, English, team work, confidence, ICT, using creative medium, communication and decision making skills. The final product was excellent and the group and school received positive publicity and this was very much appreciated.

### **Challenges for next 12 months**

The main challenge for this organisation looking forward to the next 12 months is that of continuity of funding. This academic year's funding for family learning has been significantly reduced which mean that Apextra is not able to fully meet the needs of parents and schools and activities will only be offered to April 2015.

### **Case Study No.2: Foundation of Light - Tackle It with Kicks Building Bridges Project**

Main client/target group: General community via projects which address specific needs

This project is funded through the Police and Crime Commissioner, Vera Baird, with the outcome of breaking down barriers between rival supporters in Sunderland and Newcastle and with the Police. It addressed issues of self-esteem, peer pressure and stereotyping, with an emphasis on making positive and safe choices and how to avoid anti-social behaviour. The Foundation of Light (FoL) worked in partnership with Newcastle United Foundation to deliver the project to young people in schools and youth groups across Tyne and Wear. The Foundation of Light delivered the project to four schools in Sunderland and Washington during January-March 2014, engaging 356 young people from Years 7-9. The impact was immediate, with Emma Routledge, Head of PE, Washington School stating

*"The 'Tackle It with Kicks' project has been extremely successful. Not only has it changed the thinking and viewpoints of some of our pupils regarding rivalry but it has been an extremely fun session. The sessions were well organised and the leaders were confident and well-liked by the pupils. If these sessions would be available again we would be very keen to give the opportunity to some of our other pupils".*

The project returned to Washington School in the new academic year and pupil response to delivery was so positive that the team were requested to deliver it to a whole year group. The Foundation of Light has

also been invited to explore ways in which it can support the school through the delivery of projects which focus on personal and social development

#### Challenges for next 12 months

The FoL has undergone a re-structure, establishing a new operations area in the Washington and South Tyneside. Establishing hubs and developing relationships with a broad range of organisations and bodies is an ongoing challenge. Additionally, identifying and establishing mutually beneficial partnerships and identifying funding opportunities are constant challenges, especially so in the first year of operation.

#### **Case Study No.3: Harraton and District CA**

Main client/target group: General community

In 2013 a new voluntary committee was formed to take over the management and governance of the centre. Since then all aspects of the centres activities have increased for example the income has gone from a few hundred pounds in the bank in 2013 to over ten thousand pounds in the bank in February 2015. The numbers of people visiting the centre have significantly increased with over 150 visits each week. Working with an external partner the committee decided to reduce the weekly rental payment of a playgroup. This allowed the playgroup to continue to meet and, over time, develop. Without the committee's support the group would have closed. Some months later the playgroup is very well attended and, as a result, has been able to purchase some fantastic play equipment which can also be hired for parties etc. This ensures that the children of Harraton (and surrounding area) have high quality, assessable play opportunities and that their parents have the opportunity to socialise with other parents.

#### Challenges for the next 12 months

The voluntary management committee is currently in discussions with the city council to determine ownership of the building. The situation at the present time is somewhat ambiguous as a result of the historical transfer of the facility from one authority to another. The management group has plans to improve the physical condition of the building but to do so will require significant support. Therefore it is fundamental that the situation relating to responsibility for the building going forward is resolved.

#### **Case Study No.4: Washington Millennium Centre**

Main client group: General community

The Millennium Centre caters for a whole range of users and activities and in the last 12 months has increased the community usage as they make rooms available at an affordable cost for groups to be able to have a venue to be based in. Alongside that staff have gone out of their way to support homeless and unemployed people who come into the centre seeking help.

We continue to make a difference to the lives of residents in many ways. The case study is about young people who attend the Connect course for nearly 12 months. He could not read or write even though he had been through the education system. Whilst we can put right the things that have gone wrong with this person we can also strive to do our utmost to ensure we did not fail him. We did this by enabling the young person to return to do a second course at the centre, because there was trust between the young person and the staff and it was what they wanted. They supported the young person to develop some basic skills which we take for granted, like being on to more specialist training so that they can continue to make progress. Because of the time they spent at the centre completing the courses, we have given them the confidence to start to address their needs and go on to develop basic reading and writing skills.

#### **Case Study No.5: Age UK**

Main client/target group: Any person aged 50 or over

Client A a 50+ woman was referred into the Washington Age UK office with having low esteem issues, lack of self-confidence, and isolating herself. The client sought help from the Volunteer Service which is also a member of the VCS network. After some initial work –the Volunteer Service contacted Sunderland Age UK Washington office to see if they could support this client in moving forward. Sunderland Age UK took on the client as a Day Club Volunteer, helping in one of the five lunch groups in the Washington area. That was two years ago. Client A is now a group leader who is outgoing, confident, reliable, and compassionate, bringing alot of common sense, and practical ability to the work that she is involved in. Without knowing, this volunteer had amassed so much experience in her own life that it certainly made the difference to her

in her new role, and a lot of difference to the lives of the clients in the lunch club. So much so that she is now applying for full time work. Client A commented on this article.

*“Yes being part of a team, and working in the local area has helped me so much. I now look forward to moving on and progressing in my life”*

#### Challenges for next 12 months

Funding and resources to further develop services and volunteers continue to be of critical importance for the next year. The Care Act which will be implemented by April 2015 in Sunderland, will also mean big changes for many older people who receive care and support – and the carers that support these older people.

#### **Case Study No.6: Teal Farm Residents Association (TFRA)**

Main client/target group: Any residents in the Teal Farm area and any organisation approved by the committee. The residents association also work closely with councillors, the Environment Agency, the Durham Wildlife Trust and several local businesses have assisted with funding for our projects over the last two years.

TFRA organised a Washington 50 Garden Party in June 2014 and over 500 residents and friends took part in a friendly and social event designed to bring together the growing numbers of newer residents to the area. The group designed and created a new community garden area in 2013/14 with the help of parents and children and were awarded a merit award by the Sunderland in Bloom team in 2014. The group is now working to create a Nature Trail around the new and old housing estates with the help of funding from the council and the Community Foundation, which we hope to complete in 2015.

#### Challenges for the next 12 month

The most challenging will be to maintain the interest and involvement of the community at large, especially as there are no community facilities in the area and meetings are normally held in the offices of the local developer. The group also need to generate new committee members from the newer residents to encourage wider participation in our activities.

#### **Case Study No.7: Volunteer Centre**

Main client/target group: Individuals who have Mental Ill Health, Learning Disabilities, Physical Disabilities or those low in confidence and self-esteem.

Chris was referred into the Mentoring Project in February 2014 through his CPN from Cherry Knowle. Chris who has autism also suffered from anxiety and depression which led him to become isolated. Chris found it difficult to leave his home or travel on public transport and was conscious of others around him. Through the support and guidance from his mentor Andy, Chris began engaging in activities at the allotments in Concord Washington. Andy would meet Chris at the end of his street and take him along to the opportunity. Chris made small steps and Andy gradually reduced the support and would meet Chris at the allotments. Chris did face a few setbacks and was challenged by others lack of knowledge regarding mental ill health and autism. Andy reassured him not everyone was the same. Chris made massive progress and eventually was given his own key to the allotment and more responsibility. After 6 months Chris no longer required the support from Andy and is still volunteering at the allotment in Concord.

#### Challenges for the next 12 months

Lack of funding to support the Mentoring Project but also lack of provision/opportunities in the Washington area to place volunteers who have a barrier to independently volunteer.

#### **Case Study No.8: Washington Trust**

Main client group: General community and VCS Organisations

The Trust was successful with its bid to HLF for funding to deliver a project to engage local people in their local history and to celebrate Washington New Town being 50 years. The project has worked with a number of partners and one of the major successes has been the facebook page, which has been used to engage residents in the project, promote the project and source information for the archive. Residents have used the page to reminisce, which has supported community cohesion whilst at the same time allowing people to show the pride they have in the Town because they either lived or are living in Washington. The video we posted on the site showing highlights of the Christmas lights switch on has been viewed by over

2,000 people. The partnership work with North East Film Archive has results in over 50,000 people being aware that Washington New Town was 50 in 2014. We have had comments from as far as Canada and Australia. The key achievements has been to engage a wide range of residents, spread positive messages about Washington across the globe and reinforce the pride people have for Washington.

### **Case Study No. 9: Washington Mind**

Main client/target group: People wanting to improve their wellbeing, or who are experiencing or at risk of developing mental ill health and the wider community access to training and information resources.

**Washington 50** - Funding enabled us to host a community open day, working with partners to showcase activities around Washington 50. This family fun day celebrated our 1<sup>st</sup> birthday in the Life House and we were able to give our local community tasters of the wellbeing activities that are going on here.

**Wellbeing in Mind** – A lot of the people we see experiencing mental health issues are also socially isolated. We were able to offer a wide range of activities and taster sessions targeting older people who went on to use other services and increase their wellbeing.

### **Ruth Shares Her Story**

“The Community Engagement Worker, Wendy followed me out and asked me if I would like her to sit with me for the first few weeks. From that day I have fully embraced Washington Mind and have accessed a range of groups and activities within the Life House. They made sure I was comfortable in their new building and got a hearing loop system installed to help me. I firstly attended the Arts and Crafts sessions which take place on a Monday afternoon. This group really helped to build my confidence and I now help to facilitate this group as a Service User Volunteer. I took part in a Tia Chi for beginners’ course which I really enjoyed. A group of us used to stay behind afterwards for a coffee and cake in the Life House Tea Room – I really got to know the participants of the group and enjoyed the conversation and a bit of laugh. I went along with this group to other activities such as complementary therapies, which really helped me to relax and this in turn helped me to cope with my physical pains. I have even managed to fit in the odd treat and book myself into the spa for a couple of beauty treatments. This helped me feel better about myself!

Washington Mind has been my life line, I have been discharged from the pain clinic – accessing their services has been the best pain management, having a good laugh for 2 hours I leave the Life House pain free. Washington Mind staff are a passionate dedicated team of caring professionals that create the perfect balance. Which is why the Life House works! It’s a lovely place to be. I feel privileged to be part of such a wonderful organisation. Washington Mind don’t clear the road but become the road to recovery!”

**13TwentyFive Conference** – On World Mental Health Day, 10<sup>th</sup> October, Washington Mind’s 13TwentyFive Project hosted a conference for young people. The purpose of this conference was to give young people the opportunity to share their experiences and views with regards mental health, with those that deliver and commission services. Prior to this conference we were in dialogue with young people who advised us on our approach, and who influenced the structure of the day. We had 90 attendees in total, half of which were aged between 13-25 years. We were also fortunate to be joined by service users, Sharon Hodgson (MP), commissioners, parents, councillors, schools/colleges, and mental health services as well as a variety of other professionals.

The theme of the day and title of the subsequent report which can be accessed via our website was to “work together to hear and understand the needs of young people”.

**The Life House** - Between January and December 2014, Washington Mind received 2,012 new referrals to our service. The Life House itself had 13,450 visitors, with 8,897 of those accessing our social support services or and wellbeing activities. Wellbeing information, services and activities have also been accessed through [www.wellbeinginfo.org](http://www.wellbeinginfo.org) with 240,443 visitors to the site from January 2014 – 2015 and over 6,000,000 hits.

**Washington Mind Training Programme** – During the period of January 2014 to 2015 the Life House has been the venue for a variety of mental health and wellbeing training sessions. We have trained..... at the Life House, increasing skills, confidence and knowledge to support and signpost to appropriate and relevant services across our community. A LIFE Worth Living Suicide Prevention Training has enabled Washington Mind to begin to breakdown the stigma associated with suicidal thoughts and therefore encourage conversations that can save lives.

### Challenges for next 12 months

Funding- Like all VCS organisation long term funding is always an issue, making it difficult to properly plan ahead and lack of job security for staff.

Capacity – referrals have increased dramatically over the last few years without the funding/resources to increase capacity.

Mental health - Reducing stigma and discrimination, more and more people in mental health crisis, at risk of suicide and self harming.

### **Examples of VCS and other sectors working collectively to support Area Committee aims:**

#### **Washington 50 – Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Washington New Town**

Washington Area committee invested up to £50,000 to encourage the local community to come together and celebrate this golden birthday. It was essential that the community itself was involved – developing ideas to celebrate and in particular to encourage grassroots organisations to step forward and be part of the celebrations and help ensure a legacy remained. An invitation went out inviting proposals for activities and events. The Area committee has supported a wide range of projects, activities and events which has seen grassroots organisations, schools, voluntary and community organisations, resident groups, and young people all coming forward with some great ideas on how their 'Community Programme' for Washington50 can be part of the celebrations. Some 34 project ideas were supported. Many 1000s of local people were either involved in the projects or attended the local events.

In addition the Washington 50 web site was set up – this can be accessed at [www.sunderland.gov.uk/Washington50](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/Washington50) . The site includes lots of information and photographs of some of the great projects funded. Some great examples of the local community coming together, forming partnerships and delivering a legacy includes

- 16 primary schools joined together with staff and pupils stepping back in time as they each held their own 60's themed picnic. In addition to the picnics each school created a section of artwork to be joined together with the other school's to complete a unique canvas. The schools also created a short film featuring a compilation of readings, songs and performances taking viewers on a tour of Washington's history. Both the canvas and the film were showcased at the annual Heritage and Community Festival held in September.
- Many other 'artefacts' were exhibited at both the Heritage Festival and a celebration event held at Washington Old Hall. This included mosaics, wall hangings and banners, a book developed with a local primary school looking at Washington 50 through the eyes of our children, commemorative pieces of art structure in ceramic and willow,
- The 'Ancient Town in a Modern Setting' pamphlet/leaflet with illustrations and a village map was produced by the friends of the Old Hall. It included a walking tour map and the changes in Washington, in particular the influence of Washington New Town.
- Working with a Community Artist the Washington Miners and Community Heritage Group will produce 6 compositions portraying the development of Washington as a New Town – including the mining heritage of the area and local landmarks. The compositions will be sited at community venues throughout the area.
- Arts Centre Washington launched a 'Snapshot of Your New Town' exhibition of photographs taken by the local community of their favourite architecture in Washington New Town. The unique exhibition also included a floor based collage produced with Biddick School
- Washington School's Living History Project will capture the experiences of local residents and families through audio and video interviews which will be archived digitally via 'The Cloud'. A blue plaque heritage trail app will also be created using QR code technology.

- Wessington School and local residents will create a History Garden and Rickleton Primary School worked with Groundwork and the City Council to plant a Washington 50 garden in the school grounds.
- A whole host of events took place throughout the summer – Garden Parties, Summer Carnivals, music events, kite flying, and ultimately the Washington 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party and celebration event at the Old Hall.

### **Washington Area Network Going Forward**

The last 12 months have seen some great example of Area Committee and the sector working together to address common issues and needs. The next 12 months we hope will continue to be a productive partnership with members. The Area Network will look at establishing its own work plan and seeing how it can engage with the smaller groups in Washington and how they can be involved more.