

7 JUNE 2023**Coalfields VCS Report – June 2023**

The Coalfields VCS Network have met on 2 occasions since the last Coalfields Area Committee held on Wednesday 15th March, with the next meeting due to be held on Tuesday 6th June, which is after the date of submission for this area committee report.

VCS meetings have taken place on:**Tuesday 4th April & Tuesday 2nd May 2023**

The meetings have both taken place at Easington Lane Community Access Point and have been well attended, welcoming both returning and new members & organisations. The meetings have been chaired by Councillor Juliana Heron and have been co-chaired by the Coalfields VCS Representatives. Pauline Hopper, Sunderland City Council Partnership and Community Resilience Manager and Toni Longstaff, Sunderland City Council, Area Support Assistant have also been in attendance.

The network has welcomed different speakers at the two meetings (more detail below). The variety of topics covered by the speakers highlighting the many different organisations and community groups with an interest in both Coalfields and wider Sunderland Council area.

Meeting Tuesday 4th April 2023

Presentations/agenda items delivered as follows:

Feedback from Coalfield Area Committee – Emerly Christie (VCS rep) and Pauline Hopper updated the network members present about the Coalfields Area Committee. Following the last area committee meeting, the Coalfields reps summarised the reports and notes from the committee to then update the VCS network. Emerly updated on key community news and developments and Pauline updated on funding and budgets.

Call For Projects – Holiday Activities For Children & Young People – Pauline Hopper gave an overview of the call for projects to the whole group. The annual call for projects, which will start again from July 2023 will offer local groups and organisations up to £5,000 each to fund holiday activities for 12 sessions over the course of 2023/24 during school holidays. The fund gives both smaller and larger community groups in the Coalfields the opportunity to provide important and beneficial activities to young people whilst also supporting parents and carers with provision during the holidays. It was highlighted that the call for projects also welcomes and strongly encourages partnership working and discussions between groups across the Coalfields to avoid duplication of provision. This then ensures both a varied and accessible programme can be offered to all young people and their parent/carers.

Meeting Tuesday 2nd May 2023

Presentations/agenda items delivered as follows:

Gateshead NHS Trust Screening Programme – Emma Golightly, Health Improvement Practitioner Clinical Support & Screening Services, gave a presentation about the screening programme that is available to older adults across Sunderland (and the whole North East). The screening programme offers breast, bowel and AAA (Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm) screening. The main aim of the programme is early diagnosis and prevention. Emma clearly

made the point that if anyone feels they have symptoms they should still always go to see their GP rather than waiting for a routine screening appointment. The service has managed to catch up with their back log of people waiting for routine appointments following the pandemic. The numbers for uptake in Sunderland are quite low so Emma stressed that local community groups and organisations can help to remind people about the importance of attending appointments when invited. As a service they welcome contact and connections from groups across the area and will happily come to groups to do talks/hand out informational literature.

Cultural Spring Bitesize Project– Emma Biggins from Cultural Spring gave a presentation about ‘Redcoat’, a touring theatre production visiting local community halls and spaces across the city of Sunderland. ‘Redcoat’ is a one man show that tells the story of Lewis, a holiday camp redcoat. The project is a collaboration between Cultural Spring and The Six Twenty and will see performances taking place in May & June at small venues across the area. The main idea behind small venues is to make the theatre experience as accessible to the local community as possible. The project also works with Cozmic 3piphany, a local group that gives LGBTQ+ people in Sunderland a voice.

Further Information

The Area Arrangements team are working in collaboration with the Sunderland VCS Alliance and wider Council services and partners to bring forward social value from investments and from businesses delivering in the city, to support the voluntary and community sector. The Area Arrangements team and the VCS Alliance are also working together to understand where local community services are currently being delivered within the area, to support resident community resilience and wellbeing.

Moving forward from the warm spaces, we are continuing to work closely with the sector to extend and co-produce the ‘welcoming warm spaces’, which in the future will be potential hubs for community activities – delivering support activities as part of the wider social prescribing offer – Links for Life. A detailed update will be shared in relation to ‘Links for Life’ and the need to continue to grow the capacity within the VCS, in a future area network report.

Summary

The Coalfields VCS Representatives are:

Eileen Bewick (Lead Advice Worker, ShARP)

Emerly Christie (Centre Manager, The Old Rectory)

Wendy Cook (Youth & Community Manager, SNCBC)

Amy Swan (Creative Director, Active Families North East)

All of the Coalfields VCS Representatives work directly in the Coalfields area as part of large and well-established organisations and have great connections both in the area and citywide. Each of the four representatives have different professional and experienced backgrounds, bringing a varied insight to then come together to support Coalfields VCS groups. By working together, they are best placed in the community supporting both individuals and groups and serving the network as best possible.

The Coalfields VCS network continues to be well attended with near to 40 groups regularly taking part in meetings. The meetings in 2023 have seen new organisations and members joining, which highlights both the great work going on in the area and the support that is given

from the council and the Coalfields VCS network. It has become well recognised and therefore important to mention that VCS network members in the Coalfields work well together and strongly support each other. This is reflected in the provision that is available to the Coalfields community and local residents.

As always, the 'information share' agenda item towards the end of the meeting provides a lot of information to the groups attending and often provokes discussions about issues and challenges that residents in the Coalfields locality are facing. It gives both large and small organisations within the area the opportunity to positively come together, sharing ideas and suggestions to support each other. Ultimately it gives the Coalfields community and local VCS organisations a voice that is heard.

The information share/AOB part of the network meeting highlights the breadth of organisations and activities that we have in the Coalfields. The cost-of-living crisis continues to be a topic that is widely discussed and it is noted at every meeting how this continues to affect residents and community groups alike.

The Coalfields VCS network would like to take this opportunity to thank Sunderland City Council – Coalfields Area Committee for their ongoing support and providing funding opportunities for local VCS groups and organisations. Many organisations in the Coalfields face ongoing challenges and issues, some of these issues undoubtedly are discussed, support and often even resolved via the VCS network.