



Northumberland **CVA**

March 2021 | Issue 6

Four Corners

Our magazine for voluntary and community organisations in Northumberland

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About Four Corners

The name of our magazine, 'Four Corners', is significant for a number of reasons:

1. We deliver services across all four corners of Northumberland.
2. The name also refers to the four corners of our logo
3. This in turn relates to our four main organisational objectives, which can be summarised as: governance and funding support, volunteering support, community development, and voice and influence.

Four Corners is published twice every year in early spring and in mid-summer. Along with our Annual Review, which is published around October/November time, you can expect a publication every four months to keep you up to date with everything that is happening at Northumberland CVA.

We do hope you enjoy this magazine. We'd love to hear your comments, so do please get in touch:

Email: enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk

Call: 01670 858688

Images in this issue

Working remotely through the pandemic has made it impossible to illustrate our work through the photos we'd normally take at actual events and so for several of the articles in this issue, we've searched online for suitable free to use, royalty-free stock images:

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Welcome

Welcome to our latest issue of Four Corners, Northumberland CVA's magazine for voluntary and community organisations in Northumberland.

It's hard to believe that we've now passed the one year milestone since the first COVID lockdown began in the UK on 23rd March 2020. And while, at the time of writing, the third lockdown continues and our offices are still closed to the public, the huge success of the vaccine roll-out across the UK has brought a new promise that we will soon be able to start getting back to a new normality.

Quite how different that new normality will turn out to be remains to be seen since there have been some seismic shifts in civil society during the pandemic.

Early last year, charities were being criticized for consigning digital change to the very bottom of their list of priorities as a borderline irrelevance, and yet the enforced change to the way services had to be delivered during the pandemic has pushed digital right to the top of the agenda, bringing with it opportunities for innovation, yes, but also huge challenges in accessibility and cyber-security too.

We're currently looking at the possibility of providing training on digital skills and we'd like you to tell us about your digital challenges and training needs. You can find out more about this work on page 5.

Equality, diversity and inclusion has also come to the forefront. From the #CharitySoWhite movement, which began in August 2019 and brought to light hundreds of stories of racism in the charity sector, to the global protests following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 that changed our thinking around racial prejudice further. From revelations of bullying and harassment at NCVO last month, which prompted a wave of comments using the hashtag #NotJustNCVO, and International Women's Day's #ChooseToChallenge campaign, to the tragic murder of Sarah Everard that has shone a beacon on issues of women's safety.

The recent refresh of the Charity Governance Code includes a completely new section on equality, diversity

and inclusion and this is an area that we believe funders will now be looking at very closely too when it comes to the policies of applicants.

It's an area we have already been looking at when it comes to our own work, and I would ask you as advocates to look at this too.

The climate emergency is another area that has been gathering pace during the pandemic, from the first signs of nature's rapid flourishing in built up areas when streets were suddenly deserted, to new concerns about the use of single use plastics in PPE.

Also, Northumberland County Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23 now has gained full council approval in the midst of lockdown and this an area of work that the VCS Assembly is keeping a close eye on.

So while we progress through the different stages of the government's roadmap out of lockdown, the voluntary and community sector's new normality will gradually emerge and we'll be ready to adapt to the new opportunities and challenges.

However, much of our work in communities depends on being able to work together with other organisations and so we would greatly appreciate being kept in the loop as services open back up across the county and, as always, if you'd like support in any areas of funding, governance, partnership development, developing your organisation, involving volunteers or engaging with your community, we can help.

Simply email enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk.

Anne Lyaal

CEO



Join the conversation

Northumberland Voluntary Information Network (VINE) is a great place for discussions and debates about the issues affecting your work - or simply somewhere to ask for advice or guidance when you're stumped.

The VINE is a group email network,

with membership open to anyone working in the VCSE in Northumberland in either a paid or voluntary capacity.

Whether you're a volunteer, trustee, CEO, team leader, manager, or officer; whatever your role, you can be part of the conversation on the VINE.

To join, email enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk, tell us your name and the name of the organisation you work or volunteer for, and we'll get you signed up

Reviewing our Equality & Diversity policies and practices



Even before the findings of an independent review into equality, diversity and inclusion issues linked to bullying and harassment at the national umbrella charity, NCVO had been made public in February of this year, sparking a social media storm using the hashtag [#NotJustNCVO](#), we had already begun the process of reviewing our own practices and policies regarding equity, equality, inclusion and diversity.

Whilst we have always endeavoured to review all of our policies every two years, there have been a number of national and global developments that have made diving deeper into this area of our practice and policy much more important at this present time.

In August 2019, the discovery of racist language and stereotypes used in Citizens Advice training sparked the [#CharitySoWhite](#) movement as more and more people of colour tweeted about their experiences of racism in the sector.

The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020 sparked global protests linked to the [#BlackLivesMatter](#) campaign and changed the ways in which people think and speak about racism across the globe.

International Women's Day 2021 had already launched their [#ChooseToChallenge](#) campaign, calling out gender

bias and sexual inequality when the country was rocked by the horrific murder of Sarah Everard. On top of all this, COVID-19 has widened all manner of equality gaps in society.

As all this was going on, the long awaited [refresh of the Charity Governance Code](#) brought in a completely new section on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to replace the previous Principle 6: Diversity, which feedback had shown to be weak.

As well as working on our equality, diversity and inclusion policies, we have been working on improving our practices and all of our staff have now attended cultural competency training to support our work.

As a Local Infrastructure Organisation, we also have a duty to raise awareness amongst community groups of any issues that may affect them, and we believe that this is an area of policy that funders will now begin to examine closely when groups make applications for funding.

For this reason, Ann Atkinson wrote a series of bite-size blogs addressing each area of equality, diversity, inclusion and unconscious bias, which you can still access on the [Northumberland VCS Assembly website](#).

If your group would like support in this area, please email us: enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk.

Choosing to Challenge: calling out gender inequality

Striking the #ChooseToChallenge pose



International Women's Day
2021

#ChooseToChallenge

The campaign theme for International Women's Day 2021 on 8th March was [#ChooseToChallenge](#).

Event organisers called upon supporters to raise a hand high to show their commitment to choosing to challenge and calling out inequality, on the basis that a challenged world is an alert world and from challenge comes change.

“We can all choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality. We can all choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. Collectively, we can all help create an inclusive world.”

International Women's Day website

The issue of gender equality has taken a backward step since the beginning of the pandemic. Women have been [more likely to be furloughed](#), and are likely to [spend more time than men on unpaid household work and childcare](#) since the burden of unpaid care is disproportionately carried by women.

And while more men died from COVID-19, the first year of the pandemic saw [women's wellbeing more negatively affected](#) than men's.

COVID lockdowns have caused a worldwide increase in domestic abuse that has been described by the UN as a “shadow pandemic” and it has been estimated that around [90% of domestic violence victims are female](#).

At Northumberland CVA, we've risen to the challenge; we've worked in our teams, through our bulletin and social media channels and with partner organisations to raise awareness of International Women's Day and issues facing women. As you can see, lots of us have struck the #ChooseToChallenge pose to show our commitment to celebrating women and calling out gender inequality.

International Women's Day takes place every year on 8th March. Find out more: www.internationalwomensday.com/

Who's in the Photos: left to right, top to bottom

Ann Atkinson, Assembly Development Officer; *Liz Ions*, Operations Manager; *Sarah Tate*, Supported Volunteering Project Administrator; *Martin Conway*, Community Builder; *Caroline Burden*, Volunteering Support Officer; *Karen Cox*, Project Co-ordinator; *Marc Johnson*, Development Officer for Funding; *Anne Lyall*, CEO; *Jackie Auld*, Information and Communications Officer; and *Tracy*, Volunteer Buddy - all from NORTHUMBERLAND CVA. *Brooke Burgess* and *Sarah Robinson* from STOBHILL LINK. *Mandy*, Bridge Connector from NORTHUMBERLAND CVA. *Sarah Robinson*, CEO from FULL CIRCLE FOOD PROJECT. *Candice Randall* from BRIARDALE HOUSE. *Yvonne Carter*, *Julie Mills* and *Harriet Wallace* from NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BANK

What are your organisation's digital training needs?



We're investigating the possibility of providing training on digital skills to organisations, and we want to hear from you about your digital training needs.

During COVID-19, having access to digital technology has for many people allowed them to continue to work and learn, shop online, be kept informed and stay connected with family and friends. For others, a lack of digital technology has created a seemingly insurmountable barrier.

Not everyone can afford the technology and there are many, particularly older people, who simply don't have the skills or confidence to be able to use technology effectively. And of course for some living in rural areas, poor connectivity means a double whammy of digital exclusion.

But it's not just individuals who have been impacted; while there has been some wonderfully innovative digital development work done in the VCS in Northumberland, some organisations too have been adversely affected by digital exclusion, with some being unable to deliver their services at all during the pandemic because of a lack of knowledge, equipment or connectivity within the organisation itself, or poor digital inclusion amongst service users.

And of course cyber-criminals have been equally innovative. Consider the increasingly sophisticated scams over recent months, designed to exploit every online weakness.

Small organisations are attractive targets for scammers, and in particular small charities and community groups that may have considered that the expense of new digital equipment, training or security measures comes a poor second to investing their funds in COVID-19 response efforts in their community.

At Northumberland CVA, we know how hard the past year has been for all organisations, and adapting service provision online to continue contact with users and beneficiaries has been particularly challenging, as has getting to grips with using all the new technologies out there.

COVID will certainly have shone a light on the digital weaknesses in your organisation.

Whatever level of digital support your organisation needs, we want to know about it so we can tailor future training to accurately meet the needs out there.

Email ann.atkinson@northumberlandcva.org.uk and let her know about your particular digital training needs.

Re:connect tablet loan scheme for isolated older people



COVID-19 has disproportionately affected older people and confined them to their homes. Throughout the pandemic we have been unable to provide support through our usual Re:action shopping trips or Doing Digital sessions in the community to help keep our older people active and connected to their loved ones.

But through Re:connect, a new six-month project funded by the National Lottery Emergency COVID-19 Fund, we've been able to provide a tablet loan scheme to help keep older people connected with each other, with friends and families, and with any local community groups they were involved with pre-COVID.

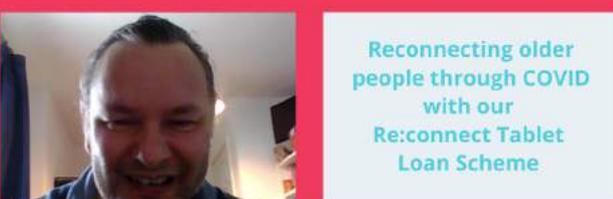
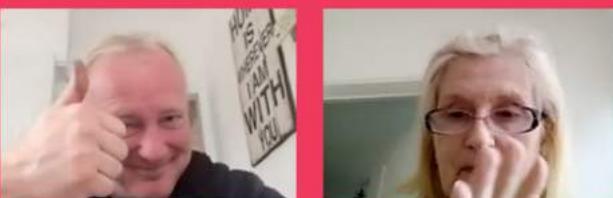
Individuals who joined the project have received the loan of a tablet with preinstalled apps, such as BBC news, weather and Zoom apps, so that it was simple for our less IT literate service users to use. We also supplied a protective case and basic instructions on how to switch on and navigate the device.

Our existing Doing Digital IT support volunteers initially provided 1:1 support via telephone to answer client's questions and encourage them to attend zoom sessions. Safety online is of paramount importance and so we made sure all our service users were aware of cybersecurity issues and how to protect themselves against online scams.

With the volunteers support, we developed weekly Zoom sessions for our older people where they can meet fellow service users, chat, share experiences, and highlight any issues with their tablets, such as automatic software updates that change some of the settings, making it more difficult for an inexperienced user to navigate the tablet.

Developing this familiarity with online meetings allows them to also keep in touch with their own friends and family via Zoom separately.

Further 1:1 sessions with a volunteer provides support around online shopping and accessing cheaper utilities and, as they became better at using their tablets, we



Reconnecting older people through COVID with our Re:connect Tablet Loan Scheme

“ This has opened a whole new world to me. The volunteers are so patient when they are talking to me over the phone. I did not realise how easy it is to use, I wished I had gotten one years ago. The best bit for me is each night I facetime my sister and we talk for hours; it is like we are in each other's living rooms. Brilliant! ”

“ I lie in bed listening to an audio book most nights it is so relaxing. I found out about this at a weekly zoom session. I was struggling on what I needed to do, and the volunteer was able to talk me through step by step. So helpful.”

“To help with the Re:connect project has been great; I've been able to occupy myself with sessions and organising the quizzes. It's not just the older people who benefit from this project, the volunteers do too.”

introduced speakers via Zoom, giving advice on energy efficiency and seated exercise. Northumberland library service also provided information for the older people on press reader and other apps to gain free access to ebooks and audio books as well as free newspapers and magazines.

Lockdown has impacted on the mental and physical health of older people, but this project has kept people engaged and connected to their local communities, clearly illustrating the vital link our volunteers provide with the older people we support. Our 5 digitally trained volunteers supported 31 isolated older people to stay connected through the pandemic. We provided over 300 telephone calls to individuals and held 15 online group sessions with an average of 10 people attending each session.

As well as linking with established partners, we have developed a new partnerships with organisations to help support some of their members to keep them connected, including Choppington Disability Group, Mind Active and Bedlington Creative.

This project has enabled us to re-think our face to face service and develop the digital side to help reduce the social isolation of our older people. With uncertainty surrounding the re-opening of many activity groups for older people, it is evident that both digital and face to face support will be needed further to ensure our older people stay connected and independent.

We're looking for new Volunteer Buddies

Our Supported Volunteering project encourages individuals with a range of additional support needs to gain confidence, self-esteem and practical skills by undertaking volunteering with the support of a Volunteer Buddy to help them move into unsupported volunteering, training or employment. The project forms one of Northumberland CVA's Bridge Northumberland interventions.

We want to recruit people interested in becoming Volunteer Buddies to support other volunteers by accompanying them to volunteering opportunities now lockdown measures are easing.

Project Co-ordinator Lisa Wackett says lockdown has had a big impact on the project, with all supported volunteer activity having to stop. But now, as restrictions start to lift, she's hoping people can get their training underway to become a Volunteer Buddy, ready to start when it's safe to do so, with opportunities already being lined up.

“We've got a huge pool of people who want to start volunteering but who just need that extra bit of support to get going. The support we're asking people to give as Buddies can be as simple as providing transport to enable people to take part in volunteering, or it may be a bigger commitment where the Buddy stays and helps them with the activity. Confidence can be an issue, so having a Buddy alongside them in the early days is always a huge boost.

“Either way, we're really grateful for our buddies support, and can work with whatever available hours or level of commitment people are comfortable with. What I can promise is that it's an incredibly worthwhile experience.”

If you'd like to become a Volunteer Buddy, please email lisa.wackett@northumberlandcva.org.uk.



Building on the accessibility of volunteering during COVID-19

Last year we were successful in securing some National Emergencies Trust funding, distributed by the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland. This funding enabled us to employ a new Volunteering Support Officer on a six-month contract to support our volunteer brokerage services and Caroline Burden started in the post in October 2020.

This funding comes to an end at the end of March, but we've been able to retain Caroline's services under a different funding stream.

Caroline has written this piece specially for this edition of Four Corners.



Caroline Burden

Email: caroline.burden@northumberlandcva.org.uk

As we approach the anniversary of the first lockdown it seems apt to reflect on the important role that volunteering has played over the past 12 months.

Throughout this time the need for support from volunteers has continued unabated on both a local and national level. Volunteers have enabled systems and structures for vital support to continue and have been pivotal in supporting local groups and organisations cope with the monumental challenges that COVID-19 has presented us all with.

Whilst I've never doubted the resilience of the voluntary sector in dealing with crisis and change, the speed at which organisations reviewed and adapted their activities to enable safe delivery has been astounding and has unlocked new possibilities.

This in turn has made volunteering more accessible, opening up opportunities to get involved to new audiences. In addition, there has been positive change

in recognising the important role that volunteers play in supporting local communities, and we must not lose sight of this as we move forward.

Since starting work on the project at the end of October it has been extremely rewarding to work on a one-to-one basis with so many volunteers.

The brokerage scheme has been successful in moving prospective volunteers into roles with local organisations, including trusteeships, conservation activities, COVID-related roles such as those supporting mass vaccination sites and opportunities which are part employability projects. It's also been great to support organisations with publicising roles, which has led to an increased range of volunteering opportunities on our volunteer recruitment platform.

As we move (hopefully) towards the lifting of some restrictions over the coming months, our task now is to support organisations with the recruitment of volunteers to enable the restart of activities.

The ability to adapt has been commendable and technology has been key in assisting continued connection and engagement with communities and individuals.

However, for many activities, this has been no substitute for face to face contact and many will be welcoming a safe return to more normal service delivery.

The past year has seen many changes to the ways we do things, but the one constant has been the continued passion and dedication of both new and existing volunteers in supporting people through this crisis.

Our challenge now is to harness this positivity and public enthusiasm to continue to build and strengthen the volunteer base on a local and national level.



Bridge Northumberland - success despite the pandemic

More people have signed up to Bridge Northumberland's programme of one-to-one support throughout lockdown than ever before.

Providing support via telephone and online video, Bridge Workers have still been able to positively help hundreds of people into work, to start training and courses, get their finances in order, improve their digital skills or start counselling to help with mental wellbeing.

Our Bridge Workers encouraged people to view lockdown as a chance to make a positive change in their lives rather than put life on hold.

Bridge Northumberland has gone from strength to strength since its rebrand in September 2020, seeing referrals to the support programme rapidly increase. Over 1,000 Northumberland residents have been successfully helped to get a positive outcome since its start.

About Bridge Northumberland

Bridge Northumberland is a free support programme available to anyone who is age 16+ living in Northumberland and not in work, education or training.

It offers:

Tailored one to one support from a dedicated Bridge Worker

Help with job search skills, financial issues, digital skills and more

A free and easy to access service that won't affect your benefits

A focus on YOU, your goals and your wellbeing

People can refer themselves or be referred by others just by simply filling in the online referral form at www.bridgenorthumberland.org.uk/referrals or by texting 'BRIDGE' to 07393 796 522. They will receive a call back.

If you support people who are out of work and face barriers to returning, and you'd like to make a referral, email: bridgereferral@northumberlandcva.org.uk or call 01670 858688 and leave a message. We'll get back to your client within 2 working days.

The free service is delivered by partners across Northumberland including NCVA. We are funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and The European Social Fund.





CASE STUDY: Lindsey

Meet Lindsey who made great progress towards her goal of being a self-employed health educator and speaker, despite facing many barriers.

Lindsey has a hectic life as a single parent looking after two children who both have complex abilities and mental health issues. On top of this, she has to manage her own mental wellbeing and physical health conditions.

She came to Bridge Northumberland last year for help, looking to build her confidence and get support to move on with her life.

She signed up to the free support offered, fully open to suggestions on to how she could make positive changes to reach her own personal goals of helping others in the same position as herself.

Lindsey started her journey by taking part in counselling and coaching sessions so she could overcome her own personal barriers, building up her

confidence and self-esteem.

With support from her Bridge Worker Angela, she then moved into training and voluntary opportunities to develop her skills, knowledge and qualifications with a view towards becoming self-employed in the future. Lindsey's goal is to become a motivational speaker on her specialist subject of autism.

She started doing voluntary presentations to educate parents of school-age children, teachers and other organisations to help them understand the impact autism has on a child.

She has begun a Learn Direct Understanding Behaviour course and continues to develop her skills and research health conditions until she feels ready to proceed with her self-employment goal. Lindsey has already been approached for work by a Northumberland charity.

Although her focus as a motivational speaker was on her specialist subject of autism, with a little encouragement Lindsey was open to looking at other disabilities, so that once she becomes self-employed she can educate people on numerous conditions.

With financial support from Northumberland CVA, we were able to source Lindsey a Learn Direct Understanding Behaviour course, which she enrolled on. Following this, she'll continue to develop her skills and research health conditions until she feels ready to proceed with her self-employment goal.

Lindsey spoke about her Bridge Worker Angela Evans:

“ I started Bridge to help me build my confidence and help me get into more training courses to get some qualifications, as being a full-time carer I felt I needed and wanted something more for myself. My Bridge Worker has been nothing but helpful and understanding 100% to help me get started on training and volunteering of which I'm interested and have a passion for. She went above and beyond for me.”

Angela was full of praise for Lindsey:

“ Lindsey was a pleasure to work with, she required support to point her in the right direction and the rest came naturally to her as her confidence grew. She is very motivated to help others and with gaining additional knowledge to enable her to educate people in a range of disabilities and the impact on their lives she will do well in her chosen career.”

Ballinger microgrants for groups across Northumberland

A number of community groups have benefitted from our work with Ballinger Charitable Trust this year.

Following our success in 2018 working with the trust to deliver a microgrant programme for VCS groups in South East Northumberland, we have once again teamed up to run a similar programme during February and March 2021.

This year, we have focused on small groups with project ideas that aimed to help their communities respond to the impact of COVID-19 and tackle social isolation issues.

This year we've also been able to open the opportunity up to groups across the whole of Northumberland without anyone having to travel long distances since the pandemic has made online meetings commonplace. This allowed the representatives from Ballinger Charitable Trust to 'meet' with organisations from across the county all on the same day.

As in 2018, there was no application form for the grants. Instead, we advertised the opportunity in the usual ways, via our website, fortnightly e-bulletin and on social media, and we also asked partner organisations to identify any community groups they knew of that would fit the criteria. Interested groups were asked to express their interest.

As with most funding programmes, the number of groups interested in applying far outstripped the available funds and so Marc had the hard job of whittling the long list down to a shortlist of deserving applicants.

Representatives of the shortlisted groups were invited to speak to two trustees from the Ballinger Charitable Trust via Zoom for a maximum of 10 minutes. The Trust made it plain that they didn't want the process to be a Dragon's Den type interrogation but rather a friendly chat about what the groups are doing to support their communities.

All of the groups that attended the discussion were awarded the full £500 - a total of £5000 to support groups in Northumberland. Below, you can see what some of them plan to do with the grant.

All of the applicants who didn't make the shortlist were offered additional support to identify alternative funding sources for their projects.



Cambois Primary School



Support for their community food bank project in order to reach more people

The Dandelion Collective



Building raised beds as part of the development of a small horticultural project in Cambois

Choppington Together



Community activities including an Easter egg trail and fish and chips for older people

Engage in the Community



Activities for older and isolated residents on some of the housing estates in Blyth

Holywell in Bloom



Providing planters to older people to help keep them active

The Tanga Club



Summer activities for children and young people with additional needs from across the North East

Widdrington Station and Stobswood Food Project



Additional storage and a freezer to help this food project serve its community

Wooler Community Garden



A communal shed for people to share resources and socialise

New Hartley Community Association Food Pantry



A freezer to enable the group to store more food for their community

Connecting communities through COVID-19

In January, our six-month Connecting Communities Project came to an end. Funded by the National Lottery Emergency COVID-19 Fund, the project aimed to both support older residents in Northumberland and to connect our communities at a local level by supporting local people to make a difference to those most affected by the pandemic.

You can find out about our work with older people under this funding stream on page 6. This article concentrates on the second element of the funding – a short-term programme of community development and capacity building using asset-based approaches.

The aim of this project was to collaborate with four 'trusted partners' in Northumberland to increase the capacity of new groups that have emerged to support their communities during the pandemic, as well as existing groups that have adapted their services to respond to the crisis at a community level. Working with the trusted partners, we promoted and advocated the use of asset-based approaches to help them support groups and volunteers in their own community.

We took several factors into consideration when contemplating our partners. We wanted a good geographical spread across Northumberland, with a mix of both rural and urban partners from across the spectrum of civil society. We also looked for a good mix of specialisms and expertise and a willingness to participate in peer support sessions with each other. Our trusted partners were:

Cramlington Town Council, which had established a community and youth team and was already actively applying asset-based approaches when working with local communities.

Hexham Community Partnership, which supports the work of the VCS Assembly and was developing joint working approaches with other VCS organisations across Hexham.

Leading Link, a Bedlington-based charity with lots of experience in delivering youth provision and providing extended support to families across a number of primary and high schools, with a strong track record of outreach and engagement.

Upper Coquetdale Community Transport, a Rothbury-based community transport organisation that provides a lot of support and connectivity across rural communities in the Coquet Valley and supports isolated people to connect to services and support.

Project management followed a 'light-touch' approach with coordinators within each partner organisation checking in with regular updates at online peer support sessions. Each partner was tasked with developing an action plan within an agreed framework and reporting back to Martin, who acted as the Northumberland CVA

“ The wraparound support they (Northumberland CVA) provide to communities, with everything from advice and information around COVID, training opportunities to funding and volunteering, is phenomenal.”

“ We are benefitting from Northumberland CVA's approach to trusting the skills, local knowledge and resources we have to deliver targeted benefits to those in our community. The flexibility of the approach is also a refreshing change to other funding models.”

“ Involvement in this project has massively contributed to my personal practice and being given the freedom to organically explore community needs, rather than work to targets and priorities has been its success.”

coordinator. Martin also administered a 'capacity building budget' on behalf of the partners, with each being allocated a portion of the funding awarded to cover core costs, expenses, overheads and any ad-hoc needs.

We didn't want to be prescriptive about how this budget was to be used. In line with asset-based approaches, we considered the partners themselves to be best placed to make the decisions about their operational budget if there were other activities or capital items they wished to fund.

Cramlington Town Council carried out five community consultations, created an online community activities and events calendar and hosted a virtual event promoting local community groups, and a community networking event at Northumberlandia with local volunteers and public sector stakeholders.

The council also developed a concept of 'Wildspaces' across Cramlington to improve access to and enjoyment of local nature sites, which brought a core group of environmental activists together, and rolled out digital training for volunteers as part of enhancing this concept.

They supported the community asset transfer of Eastfields Community Hub and helped develop Cramlington Cares, a new charity formed out of the activists involved in the local Mutual Aid group.

Hexham Community Partnership purchased and distributed tablets and other devices to residents who are digitally excluded, they developed a 'Volunteer Hub' website so that VCS groups in Hexham can coordinate volunteering opportunities and signpost potential volunteers. They adapted the delivery of digital and employability skills that had previously been delivered from the Partnership's No28 Community Hub to ensure residents who were socially isolated could still access support.

They also made advance purchases of equipment for Hexham's 'Festival of Flame' community engagement events and developed a digital skills network' across West Northumberland so that organisations delivering digital support can coordinate their services and resources more effectively.

Working in Choppington, Leading Link carried out a feasibility study and building survey on a potential new community asset in partnership with a local primary school. They supported the development of a new community group, helping them to identify their own training needs and to support isolated and vulnerable

residents over the festive period. In Linton, they helped develop a Friends of Linton Primary School group to increase the voice and influence of parents and volunteers and held discussions with the school about a possible community/ family space within school grounds. They also held a socially distanced family community event to address low morale and anxiety amongst parents.

Upper Coquetdale Community Transport purchased a fogging machine to sanitise vehicles to protect the health of existing volunteers and service users of the 'Dial a Ride' services and recruited a new member of staff to carry out community engagement and consultation. They engaged with 125 groups across Coquet Valley to identify current needs, emerging needs, skills development and capacity building support and to map community assets, and will use the data when planning future community services. They developed their shopping service for Rothbury residents who were shielding or self-isolating and continued outreach services to vulnerable members of a local lunch clubs that had to close during the pandemic.

The project might only have been six months' long and has flown over. However, it did give all parties a focus to deliver some short-term support and identify longer term development needs. COVID-19 and constant changes to both local and national lockdown measures, threw up numerous challenges and barriers which all parties responded to pragmatically. Four county-wide organisations from both urban and rural areas offering widely different services came together and connected with each other despite the geographical spread.

Northumberland CVA has demonstrated its role in providing infrastructure support. Along the way we have prompted, advised, guided and signposted as and when required. Although our staff team have worked mostly from home, in all four areas Martin provided expertise in asset-based community development, Caroline offered support to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, and Marc provided governance and funding support.

Working with four completely different partners has been challenging but this project has clearly shown that, through building good networks and relationships, some natural alliances and collaborations can evolve from that local infrastructure work. The light touch management and monitoring was also well received by our partners.

“ This project has helped to connect people to their community and be involved in making it a better place. Involvement has improved mood, reduced stress and anxiety and people have had fun. ”

“ Northumberland CVA have been brilliant and provide a real wealth of knowledge and information on every aspect of community support. ”

New themed networks for the Assembly

During the COVID lockdowns, the VCS Assembly has taken to hosting its usual area-based network meetings online. Over the last six months, at the request of Assembly members, we've also introduced two new networks, one with a food theme and other themed around health and social care. Both of these topics have gained a lot of attention through the pandemic and the key purpose of both these networks is to share information.

The Assembly Food network shares information to assist effective and efficient food provision to support residents and share good practice. The focus currently is on sharing data collected to better understand levels of need across the county and its impact on individuals and households.

The Food network will use this information to illustrate the level of food poverty in the county and the importance of working together across all sectors to combat poverty and social exclusion, and also to work with Northumberland Communities Together Food Partnerships to develop and deliver effective, innovative and sustainable local food strategies.

The Health and Social Care network has arisen from the need to understand the priorities of VCS organisations working in health and social care so that issues and concerns can be raised with Assembly Executive, the Health and Well-being Board and other key stakeholders to develop the sector's influence at a higher level.

The main priorities from the groups attending the network meeting were around social isolation and a call for action across all channels of communication, including social media, training and provision of tablets. Groups raised concerns about users and beneficiaries having the confidence to get out and socialise in their groups again once venues reopen and community activities restart. It was acknowledged that a lot of work will be needed in providing support to assist service users in returning to the activities that are so very important for their health and well-being. The importance of partnership working at a local level during the pandemic was also raised, as was the value of developing this further.

Whilst recognising that health is undergoing significant structural change at the current time it is welcoming that the voluntary and community sector is being recognised as an equal player and is expected to have a seat at the table of the Integrated Care System. This positive involvement will enable the sector to work collaboratively with trusts, health commissioners and the local authority to meet needs across the area, improving population health and reducing inequalities.

It is therefore more important than ever that we work together to understand the priorities and needs of the VCS health and social care sector and to evidence the valuable contribution the sector makes to health and well-being and the prevention agenda.



New Assembly Executive member needed to represent North Northumberland

Following the resignation of the current holder who has moved to a new job in the private sector, we are seeking a replacement on the Executive Committee to represent North Northumberland.

This opportunity provides a role in progressing the development and general direction of Northumberland VCS Assembly. You can nominate yourself or be nominated by other Assembly members, but you must be an Assembly member and we are very keen to encourage younger members to put themselves forward for this role.

Members of the Assembly Executive have a responsibility to represent the VCSE in Northumberland as a whole and not just their organisation and must have a commitment to attend four Executive Committee meeting a year.

There is also an opportunity to be part of the Northumberland County Council VCS Liaison Group, which meets quarterly. Currently all meetings are on-line.

If you are interested in representing North Northumberland on the VCS Assembly Executive Committee and would like more information, please contact Ann Atkinson by emailing:

ann.atkinson@northumberlandcva.org.uk.



Become a member of Northumberland CVA



Having a strong membership helps us to achieve our mission to engage, stimulate and inspire the creation and development of strong, sustainable and vibrant communities in Northumberland and the surrounding areas.

Membership of Northumberland CVA is free and open to any voluntary and community sector groups, clubs and organisations based within or operating in Northumberland.

Becoming a member of Northumberland CVA allows you to show your support for our mission and influence the way we develop in the future.

Membership of any organisation carries with it certain benefits and responsibilities, which you can find out more about on our membership webpage.

Our members are entitled to vote at any Annual General Meetings and Extraordinary Meetings of Northumberland CVA and to stand for election to our Board of Trustees.

To find out more about becoming a member, visit: www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/about/membership

or email Jackie Auld:
jackie.auld@northumberlandcva.org.uk

Payroll solution for VCS groups and small businesses

Ever thought of outsourcing your payroll?

Rachel, our experienced, qualified accountant provides a first class, low risk and cost effective payroll solution for voluntary organisations and small to medium enterprises that can save money and allow you to get back to delivering the services that are your bread and butter.



As well as support with any payroll issues, such as absence, SSP, SMP and record keeping, our Community Payroll package includes:

- Payroll calculation and the production of monthly/weekly pay slips
- Payroll reports and help with queries on payroll
- PAYE, National Insurance and HMRC year-end data
- P60's and Automatic Enrolment

Looking for help with your year end accounts too? You can talk to Rachel about all your payroll and accounting needs.

For more information, email Rachel Lewis:
rachel.lewis@northumberlandcva.org.uk

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