

VAS Supporting Organisations Impact report 2022-23

Introduction

VAS (Voluntary Action Sheffield) has provided support and leadership for the voluntary sector for over 90 years. We focus on community impact, influence decision makers and champion volunteering as a force for positive action.

Our mission is to support the development of voluntary and community action in a professional way, so it is sustainable and brings about positive social change.

We recognise that our remit is incredibly wide and as we say in our strategic statement, “there is not a community or part of Sheffield life where the voluntary sector isn’t engaged and embedded in a valuable contribution”. What this means is our scope is wide; we are supporting the development of social action and essentially, we include everything from system change projects to tackle health inequality to brokering volunteer roles in that space.

VAS like many VCS groups and organisations are still essentially organised and structured around ‘crisis response’, this clearly started during 2020 when our ways of working were disrupted by the Covid lockdown and has continued as the ensuing economic crisis followed.

In the last year we have invested significant time and resource in developing infrastructure that mitigates the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on Sheffield people and communities, and this report gives a summary of that work alongside some of the key areas of impact this year covering:

- [Citywide support and strategic support](#)
- [Equality and Engagement support](#)
- [Core organisational development support](#)
- [Volunteering support to individuals and organisations](#)
- [VAS Support in Numbers](#)

Citywide leadership and co-ordination

Cost of Living Crisis

VAS are a member of Sheffield’s City Strategy group, chaired by the Leader of the Council, to ensure there is oversight and a strategic approach to supporting people and communities in greatest need. VAS is also an active member of the Silver Command group (the city’s multi-agency crisis response board) regularly feeding in insight from grassroots groups and VCS organisations to shape and develop the City response.

Communications/ information- signposting

We have set up key information pages on the VAS website where we share resources both *for* the sector in terms of referral and signposting and *about* the sector in terms of explanation of the

Government proposed energy cap for charities. This structure mirrors the set up during Covid lockdown in 2020, where providing a single landing page proved useful for VCS organisations. We are reinstating our map of hubs, but are in the process of defining what hubs are offering and getting the communications right on this. We are conscious of managing the demand and therefore responsible signposting is key (see state of the sector below).

VAS bitesize briefing and peer support programme for front line workers

We have held several sessions for front line workers across the city. The purpose of the sessions is to support people in front line roles who are facing the emotional stress of supporting people and to connect them to information, useful advice and expert briefings to support them to be informed and confident in their knowledge.

Working with Citizens Advice Sheffield (CAS) to support direct volunteer recruitment and wider city capacity

We have worked with CAS to support the creation of a pre-debt advice volunteer role description to support with some triage of issues and basic form filling to help maximise income. The Debt advice service is at capacity and the lack of experienced advice workers is a big issue across the city, which won't be solved in the short term due to a lack of qualified people to recruit into these roles. We explored a community-hosted volunteer role to support with listening and early triage of basic advice issues, with a referral route into CAS, and now CAS have a team of community trainers in post to deliver this work.

Engagement with Sheffield Council 'welcoming places'

We set up the city's [Welcoming Spaces Map](#) in partnership with the local authority and have developed key communications to direct front line workers toward the city's resources and services. We continue to support the significant efforts of the VCS to support people worst affected by the rise of energy and living costs.

We are reaching out and supporting places that have identified themselves as Welcoming Places, with advice about risk assessment, help with recruiting volunteers and ensuring information reaches them.

We have also taken on the hosting of the Sheffield Money Support website (<https://sheffieldmoneysupport.co.uk/>) which has been developed between VCS partners and the Council and will continue to support its development.

Financial and skills support for VCS organisations – Building Thriving Communities

We were concerned at the lack of national support from Government (there was no mention at all of the sector in the Autumn statement) and without future energy price subsidy (beyond March 2023) many key organisations, especially those with buildings, are really vulnerable.

We have worked with colleagues from Sheffield City Council, Citizens Advice Sheffield and South Yorkshire Community Foundation to develop a Sheffield community bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority. The 3-year bid includes additional funds for the Cost of Living Grant fund administered by SYCF, as well as funding for front line VCS community organisations for development workers and funding for targeted capacity building from VAS. This programme, called Building Thriving Communities, launched at the end of March 2023.

Equality and Engagement work:

VAS has built on its outreach work post-pandemic, making links especially in underserved communities.

One to one support has been given to a number of community leaders and community organisers and often VAS is the first point of contact, to engage activists and volunteers into the wider social action sector.

Actively listening to many new and emerging groups, building their confidence and helping them to network has made them feel more confident. Passing on information and gently encouraging organisations to apply for funding, to be part of consultations, access and attend meetings and have their voice heard.

Linking people into other organisations has helped them also find peer support, which they have found helpful also. The connectivity we can support has led to cooperation and learning between groups and ultimately reduces isolation.

Our link work also continues between funders and small groups, working together to overcome the funding frustrations still felt by many ethnic minority organisations in the city.

Our Equality lead has sat on very many panels this year and helped influenced change for the city. Covid memorial panel, recruitment panels and several funding panels. The funding panels have also helped identify gaps and other support needed.

Our Equality lead has started coaching and mentoring as part of a level 7 qualification. This is at an executive level and one to one support for CEO's and senior management has started to take place in the city. A gap has been identified where staff at this level are often left isolated. This work has seen positive change in the one-to-one people supported.

More intensive work has been done with groups such as United women's affiliation and Sudanese Community Association. Both organisations have been supported and have really appreciated the networks they have been introduced to, the support and encouragement they have received and some of the hand holding and confidence building that has gone on along the way.

Quotes from both groups:

"you rescued the group when it was nearly shut down. Ladies, know that we have a big respect for you, Pam.

We increased our knowledge with your visit, things that women least think about in our inner environment." UWA

"I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude for the warm welcome and helpfulness you provided during my recent visit to your office. Your efforts made me feel comfortable and appreciated, and I want you to know how much I appreciated you.

Your willingness to assist me with my needs and guide me through the procedures was greatly appreciated. Your kindness and patience were exemplary, and I feel fortunate to have met you.

Thank you once again for your welcoming efforts" Sudanese Community Association

Leading change event

VAS held a Leading Change networking event for women working in the VCS on March 8th.

The session was well-attended with 40 women from a range of organisations represented. The session shared leadership stories from Debbie Mathews, CEO of Manor and Castle Development Trust and Gulnaz Hussein, CEO of Fir Vale Hub and provided an opportunity peer support and connectivity between women working across a range of Sheffield communities.

Quotes from event feedback :

“I wanted to say thank you so much for inviting and accepting me at the wonderful event! I was so happy to be part of that! It’s not what I expected! And it was very very inspirational! “

We gathered feedback from attendees from the event to help us shape some support for Women in the VCS going forward and will be applying for small grant support to deliver more events in different locations in the city over the coming year.

VAS Thursday morning network

The regular weekly meetings are still proving a good source of information sharing and problem solving. Regular attendance and a relaxed welcoming atmosphere has made these meetings a source of information and also support for VCS staff across the city.

“I love the Thursday morning meetings! They're a gentle but important way to start the day and a brilliant bunch of people to be in touch with.”

Core development support

This year we supported **199** diverse VCS organisations to establish, maintain and develop their services and to recruit and properly manage their volunteers. We provided 1:1 support and guidance, signposting to other resources, advice surgeries and other outreach events, and opportunities for organisations to come together in forums and networks.

Organisations were faced with the challenge this year of delivering during a cost-of-living crisis. For many, budgets were being squeezed by increasing costs just as demand for their services rose. The majority of organisations we worked with (72%) were small, with incomes of under £10k, and our support focussed on helping them to be in a strong position to look for funding. We provided tools and guidance to help them review and strengthen their governance and demonstrate the impact of their services and enabled them to network and build connections and partnerships.

For new groups emerging through the year, we provided support to help them establish solid foundations - establishing clear aims, producing a constitution, getting a bank account and developing basic policies and procedures. We then connected them in with SYAB for practical funding advice.

We reached out to organisations in communities through LAC meetings, where we talked to local VCS groups about the support VAS could offer, provided advice and guidance, and facilitated discussions about practice when recruiting volunteers. We also delivered a series of Funding and Advice Surgeries in local community venues across the city in partnership with SYFAB.

We provided support to lunch club leaders as they continued to build their services back up after the impact of the COVID pandemic. Cost of living increases, particularly rising food costs, made delivering a weekly high quality, nutritious lunch to their members a real challenge and was one of the regular topics of discussion in monthly Lunch Club Organisers meetings facilitated by VAS.

Advice surgeries with SYFAB

VAS partnered with SYFAB to deliver Funding and Advice surgeries in community venues across Sheffield.

Within the year we delivered **7** full day surgeries enabling **42** organisations to benefit from a 1:1 consultation a SYFAB Funding Advice Officer and a VAS Support Officer.

Organisations received joined up advice and guidance from VAS on getting themselves in a strong position to apply for funding and from SYFAB on identifying potential funders and making good applications.

Feedback showed that groups valued being able to access advice locally and receiving joined up support from both VAS and SYFAB. Surgery sessions had increased their knowledge and understanding of the support available to them and made them more confident to seek support in the future.

“It is excellent that you travel out to different neighbourhoods to meet people on their home turf, and that you provide individual support sessions. I thought the resources handed out were very appropriate, well written and extremely helpful. Couldn’t be happier!”

“The drop-in surgery run by VAS and SYFAB was extremely useful to our organisation. [VAS Support Officers] have provided information and advice on policies, procedures, volunteering and getting ready to apply for funding. It's good to know that if I need any help, VAS staff are available to help and signpost.”

“It's useful to be able to see [both VAS and SYFAB] in one place. I now have a better understanding of the services, and having met people face to face will be more likely to access these in the future.”

Support for Lunch clubs

We supported **42** Lunch Clubs this year through 1:1 guidance, regular emails containing information and resources, training opportunities, and regular network meetings for Lunch Club Organisers.

Monthly Zoom meetings provided Lunch Club leaders with the opportunity for peer learning and support and for information sharing from VAS and from guest speakers on subjects including dementia, falls prevention, funding, volunteer recruitment, and transport.

We provided two new Lunch Clubs with support to get established. Others received 1:1 guidance and support on various issues including safeguarding and volunteer recruitment.

Lunch Club volunteers were also able to access First Aid training and Food Hygiene and Allergens organised by VAS.

“ZOOM sessions organised by VAS, alongside continuing support, have been so valuable through this year. VAS was especially helpful in brokering Training for Sheffield Lunch clubs. Our volunteers took up training in Food Hygiene and First Aid in May. It would have been impossible for individual Lunch Club organisers to negotiate a fair deal otherwise. Certificated training is a key ‘gift’ for volunteers who do so much for nothing.”

“Being in contact with other lunch clubs on Zoom has been very useful in several ways and it is reassuring to know that there are other groups in Sheffield facing similar problems and successes. It was useful to discuss the increasing price of food and thus the necessity to put fees up. A comparison with what other lunch clubs charge eased my “guilt” over the £1 increase. My aim not to compromise on the standard of food was shared by others and I bear this in mind when preparing a menu and at the supermarket.”

Volunteering: Support to individuals and Organisations

The Volunteer Centre, which is a part of VAS, has 5 core functions which inform our approach to volunteering

- Strategic development of volunteering
- Development of good practice
- Brokerage
- Development of volunteering opportunities
- Voice of volunteering

Our main priorities are:

- To raise the profile of the benefits of volunteering
- To support people who are excluded or have barriers to access volunteering
- Support organisations to develop and sustain high quality volunteer programs following best practice in volunteering.
- Offering a free online volunteer role advertising service to allow charities advertise, and volunteers to apply to opportunities they might not hear about through word of mouth.

This year has been a year of slow recovery from COVID but with the impact of COVID still being felt in the volunteering area. The number of roles being advertised has been steady, but around half of pre-COVID levels and we have supported organisations and volunteers to recover and strengthen volunteering in Sheffield.

Key areas of success this year have included:

Preparation for a new platform

Making it easy and simple for people to start volunteering is a core mission of the Volunteer Centre and our platform needed to be updated so we could provide something that would simplify the volunteering process and also offer volunteer management capability to particularly smaller charities to help them manage their volunteers.

We identified a range of options and chose Team Kinetic and started using the platform for the Community Makers project in January as a pilot so we could then launch it to the rest of the sector.

This means that as a city, we will be able to provide every charity free volunteer management software, support volunteers to apply quickly, and to keep a track of what they have done, including their training so that for those who want to volunteer as a route to employment, the facility to do that is available for all.

Brokerage

In February, we re-opened our face-to-face service at The Circle with support from our team of volunteer Advisors and have completed a full year of face-to-face support. We have moved from appointment only support to offering a drop in which is proving popular and is a good step as we return post COVID. We are only doing this 1 day a week as opposed to 3 days per week and are keeping this under review as we watch the numbers, the demand for the service and the volume of accessible roles available. The majority of people using the drop in are not able to use the website to access roles so often need entry level volunteering roles.

We have continued to offer a virtual service, but the demand for this has reduced off as the drop in service was re-introduced highlighting how the people we focus our support on prefer a face to face service.

Volunteer Standard

Sheffield Volunteer Standard is awarded to organisations who can demonstrate that their volunteer programme follows agreed good practice principles, and this almost always leads to volunteers being treated better and having a more positive, developmental volunteering experience. It takes a lot of work to go through this process and involves reviewing and updating all the relevant policies and processes, which for many organisations has taken a back seat during COVID but interest in the Standard has increased this year as people refresh their volunteering policies and are keen to show the quality offer that they have.

YWCA Yorkshire and IDAS have achieved the Standard this year and SOAR has submitted its application to renew after 3 years. We are continuing to raise the profile of the standard as structure for organisations to work through as they rebuild their volunteer base after COVID.

Facilitating Peer to Peer support - Volunteer Co-ordinators forums

The Volunteer co-ordinators forum this year have been virtual and monthly and have been a key source of support to volunteer co-ordinators. Across the year **43** organisations have attended and there is clear feedback that the peer support, connecting with other staff managing volunteers is a key need.

This year our focus has been on supporting organisations to rebuild post COVID and to network and support each other on their good practice and promoting volunteering.

There has been a marked change in charities ability to recruit volunteers as noted in the monthly meetings. Around 10-20 charities attend each month and typically 1/3 would have too many volunteers applying, 1/3 would have the right balance and 1/3 would not have enough.

This year at the monthly meetings often all charities were reporting they did not have enough volunteers, or all apart from a couple.

We are responding by working with our comms team and social media volunteers to look at how we can raise the profile of volunteering to support charities. The new platform will also support with this work.

Good practice and organisation support

Quality checking volunteer roles – Getting the basics right

There has been a slight increase this year in the number of organisations advertising roles on our volunteer platform, whilst the number of new roles advertised has remained consistent.

Each role has been checked against the Minimum Quality Standards that organisations must meet for a role to be advertised. These quality standards help to ensure that volunteering is as accessible and inclusive as possible so that everyone in the city can benefit from taking part.

Where standards have fallen short, we have worked with those organisations, providing advice and guidance on good practice in recruiting volunteers and encouraging them to make positive changes.

Forward look

The role of VCS support, Equalities, leadership and volunteering as part of ensuring a strong and vibrant city.

We are in the recovery phase post COVID and particularly the volunteering world has not recovered and has changed significantly. This brings with it some opportunities as remote volunteering is now more possible and opens the door to new volunteers, but it has also reduced the number of accessible roles which require a staff member to be physically next to a volunteer to support them to learn. This is strongly seen by the New Beginnings project as VAS supporting refugees in to entry level volunteer roles.

There is however really encouraging collaborations that have developed through and a strong recognition of the power of volunteering which if matched with resource to co-ordinate volunteers will continue to build the strong community in Sheffield that we know and love.

We will support organisations with good practice through our volunteer co-ordinators forum, revising and updating the resources on our website and particularly looking at developing inclusive volunteer roles as a pathway to work within VAS and with partners in the city. this and we are continuing to collaborate with the sector to address these issues.

VAS support in numbers

Organisation Development support

In the last year VAS have provided support in one or more area of operation to **199** VCS organisations.

Of these:

156 were supported with wider organisational support

43 were supported with skills to recruit and manage volunteers

Organisational Support

Profile (for 156 groups receiving organisational development support)

Income/Turnover of groups	Percentage
Less than £10k	72%
£10k - £50k	12%
£50K - £100k	5%
Over £100k	11%

Governance/structure of groups	Percentage
Unincorporated Associations	65%
Incorporated Charities	20%
CIC or Co.Ltd by Guarantee	15%

Groups representing or with an expressed purpose to meet the needs of :	Percentage reported of total number
BAMER communities	27%
People over 60	27%
LGBTQ+	1%
Children or young people under 19	19%
People with disabilities/chronic illness	16%
A particular faith group	1%

Volunteering development support to organisations:

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Organisations advertising	211	187	206
Unique roles advertised	537	537	479
New roles created	164	85	74

Volunteers: Registered through standard platform (excluding Virtual Advisor service)

Dataset	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Volunteers registered	1002	858	892
Gender	Volunteers	Volunteers	Volunteers
(Not Specified)	255	236	232
Female	514	440	448
Gender Not Disclosed	8	0	13
Male	225	180	196
Transgender		2	3
Ethnicity	#	#	#
(Not Specified)	440	395	378
Any Other	14	15	15
Asian or Asian British - Any Other Asian Background	14	20	15
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	3	2	3
Asian or Asian British - Indian	9	19	32
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	19	20	18
Black or Black British - African	16	1	26
Black or Black British - Any Other Black Background	1	1	5
Black or Black British - Caribbean	11	2	4
Chinese	11	14	31
Mixed - Any Other Mixed Background	9	8	6
Mixed - White and Asian	13	7	7
Mixed - White and Black African	1	2	3
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	4	2	7
Not Known or Not Provided	2	0	4
Prefer Not To Say	9	0	13
White - Any Other White Background	50	43	38
White British	372	302	284
White Irish	4	5	3
Overall white	426	350	325
Overall People of Colour	125	113	172