

**SAVTE -Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English
Sheffield Based Charity (7 Castle Green Sheffield S3 8LT)**

brief introduction and why we are making this submission

SAVTE have been providing bespoke, volunteer led English language support, since 1974 to thousands, of individuals from diverse racial backgrounds - many are refugees, asylum seekers, carers, people suffering with mental or physical health issues, all people of colour and all with low or little English which is a huge barrier to accessing services and integrating into communities. Currently the majority of people we are supporting come from Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Congo, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Kuwait, Vietnam, Albania, Slovakia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India.

We provide this service because there is need and there is nowhere else offering this in the city. For most of our beneficiaries this is the only line of support they receive. 70% of all referrals for 1:1 support come from Sheffield Council front line departments.

We are a small organisation (last year our income was £250k. BUT with this we provided over 1:1 placements to individuals in their home/via the internet, and pre covid gave access to over 1000 people to free English support in their communities. We also developed new programmes that responded to specific needs - e.g. Family Learning, there was no provision in SHEffield for family learning with English, also many people were digitally excluded during lockdown and we responded by providing devices, access to data and support to develop skills around digital literacy.

We believe that this critical service, that supports people from multiple racial backgrounds with multiple languages - should have a long term commitment from Sheffield Council to support our sustainability. At the moment we are funded through a small core grant and the adult education budget, however we receive referrals from across the council to work with people with diverse needs. Over the years funding has been cut, and whilst we have been successful in securing external grant funding, there has been a recent change in how Sheffield Council allocates its Adult Education Funding, which will impact on our critical service and therefore the people we support.

Over the last 20 years SAVTE has received (almost automatically) funding for this programme, and therefore as a result all council departments (and health services) have been able to freely refer individual beneficiaries to our service. Sheffield Council Adult Education Department has changed funding criteria this year which has adversely affected SAVTE in terms of income. The changes have

been sudden, and have left us with an immediate budget deficit, and whilst we can ride this unexpected change this year - we cannot for the future. We believe that SCC have made these significant changes to funding without a thorough equalities impact assessment on those most vulnerable and isolated people in the community - i.e. those excluded because of no or low English and implicitly, from multi-racial backgrounds. The new criteria favours those “learners” who are able and confident to access classroom learning, Our programme is bespoke, person centred and responds to individual needs (it helps them achieve their goals, become independent and integrated and supports their family development as well).

- evidence of racial inequality in Sheffield and why we think it exists

The fact that there is a need for SAVTE, and that what we provide is provided through an “army” of 140 highly committed volunteers, to provide 1:1 support for people in their homes because there is no provision for them - ie no nearby suitable classes, no creche facility, no class at the right time (many people are forced into zero hour contracts, irregular shift patterns making it difficult to invest in a regular class - as a result - non english speakers either operate in their own monolingual communities and never develop English and therefore never reach their potential.. Thus creating further inequalities in Sheffield needs to invest in supporting people to learn ENGLISH so they are empowered, actively engaged and reach their potential. Many people we work with are women, who have moved to Sheffield through marriage - over the years, through not being able to access classes - due to care responsibilities and other circumstances - never learnt English, and as a result are isolated and vulnerable - it impacts on their access to services (especially health) as well as impacts on mental health and achieving what women from majority backgrounds achieve in their lifetime - ie racial inequalities further exacerbated by gender inequalities.

All the beneficiaries we work with experience complex and multiple barriers that only bespoke individualised support that help overcome. There needs to be continued investment into this level of support for the most vulnerable and isolated. Covid has exacerbated these inequalities and we are finding that there has been a reduction in referrals to our service and we surmise that it is because there has been a reduction in face to face services, therefore frontline workers are not picking up the holistic needs of an individual - identifying the tapestry of interventions that will help overcome barriers and therefore inequalities. Services need to have a close look at all their services that have evolved as a result of safe (and pressurised) delivery as

a result of Covid, and ensure a thorough EIA is carried out in terms of how services are delivered so as not to exclude those most vulnerable and isolated.

For SAVTE - we consulted all beneficiaries individually, through interpreters to gain detailed knowledge of needs and we have developed provision that responds to their need and as a result we have maintained provision. Because we use volunteers - we can do this efficiently and at low cost - we know that the council does not have the capacity to deliver this level of individualised service, but it still means that there is a need and therefore the council needs to recognise that there is a need and that they should ensure that resources are available to meet this need - it feels that the council want to bring all provision in house, and as a result will destroy the small organisations who have developed the practice and relationships to deliver on the ground.

Therefore we want the council to consider voluntary sector providers - who have this far and wide reach into the communities, working with people from multiple racial backgrounds and working to tackle inequalities - this can only be done in a partnership approach. I would ask the council to trust the VCF sector more, work collaboratively, trust that we know what people know and trust that we can work collaboratively to co-produce the solutions - thee needs to be a complete overhaul of how SCC works with the VCF sector if there is going to be any change in the inequalities that exist in this city.

- **More detailed information about SAVTE**

Our Approach is unique – it is not classroom based

Our organisation has been active in Sheffield since 1974 and worked successfully in partnership with SCC for over twenty years. Through a dedicated staff team and over 130 volunteers we provide bespoke service that includes one to one provision, conversation groups, family learning and community support and we've carried right on doing all this through the pandemic by moving online and developing everyone's digital skills

What we Offer – more than just English Language Support

- An effective, unique, bespoke service for learners who speak languages other than English. Learners become active citizens and workers in our city.
- Partnership working that enables effective outcomes for learners and other providers

- We take referrals for learners and volunteers from many sources including local organisations, SCC front line workers, Health services, housing providers, the Refugee Council, the Red Cross, Citizens Advice and employment services including the Job Centre.
- A multi-faceted service supporting learners and volunteers to gain valuable skills and progression to other relevant provision and employment.
- In response to the Covid-19 pandemic we adapted our programme to include accessible and increased use of digital technology and skills of new and existing learners, translated and successfully promoted public health notices and information, supporting homeschooling, distributing devices and enabled access to online services

How many people do we work with - Covid has impacted on this but

During the Covid-19 pandemic SAVTE:

- engaged 340 beneficiaries including 86 1:1 placements
- ran 14 online conversation groups
- delivered digital literacy support to 200 learners
- provided devices and data to 55 learners
- provided digital training and support for 60 new volunteers and 90 existing volunteer placements.
- made over 200 welfare calls at the point of lockdown
- provided signposting to Council services or other VCS organisations

Our annual report details the scale and range of our activities before the pandemic

<https://online.fliphtml5.com/vghsx/okaq/#p=1>

SAVTE Learners and Volunteers move into employment, become community champions and support their families to get educated and to contribute to the economic prosperity of Sheffield

Real accountability needs a partnership approach that recognises the knowledge, understanding and support for organisations closest to the communities that need them. The strength of the Voluntary sector is that it fills the gap that large statutory organisations cannot achieve. That is why it can appear fragmented to more formal providers. The strength of partnership working is bringing various components together, utilising the knowledge of engaged partners to achieve agreed outcomes.

What will be the impact of the changes in funding and potential loss of funding on the people SAVTE work with?

Sheffield City Council has supported SAVTE for more than 20 years – without this funding those we support will become even more precarious in a post Brexit and post Covid world where vulnerable Sheffield citizens are already reeling.

There was no warning of this change of direction so no time to plan for it or offer our local knowledge to inform the process of change. Creating new criteria for funding with a three week turnaround is not achievable and places SAVTE in a precarious position, not so much moving the goalposts as changing them for basketball nets just before a football match.

To fit into this model we would have to completely redesign our work and abandon our community based, grass roots delivery. In particular:

- The new funding model is based on classroom delivery which does not work for the most vulnerable new learner.
- SAVTE has a proven track record of delivering unique programmes - our programmes are designed specifically to meet the needs of adult learners unable to access traditional 'classroom' based learning provision.
- The limitation of the SCC ACL funding model for 2021-22 excludes exactly this type of innovative, flexible, effective approach that SAVTE is best known for delivering.
- The role of a SAVTE volunteer does not exist within the new tender specification and seems to require volunteers to perform as unpaid ESOL teachers.
- SAVTE's offer is to build confidence and provide English language support so that people can access other provision – the administrative burden of enrolling and tracking academic achievement for our mostly new and inexperienced participants would massively reduce our impact.
- The loss of the learning champion role in this model removes the outreach communication signposting advice monitoring and tracking process essential to ensure quality provision and that our learners are progressing and able to access the services most suited to their needs. Taking away this role from the CVS sector and creating new Council workers at the same time flies in the face of partnership working and a respect for our institutional memory and experience.

SAVTE will lose funding for the learning champion and one and a half funded/salaried volunteer development workers. Previously there has been a separate volunteer fund. The professional support from the SAVTE team enables volunteers to achieve outcomes and progression for entry-level adult learners onto their next learning pathway, up-skilled with essential English language skills, knowledge and confidence.

Under this funding model, volunteering activity will be reduced to attendance on a course and achievement of pre-defined course outcomes, removing the funds for any ongoing, professional support and development to maintain a purposeful, effective volunteer programme, which inspires learners to take their next steps and delivers results year-on-year. FACES is now delivering a passport to volunteering course - without collaborating with SAVTE but asking SAVTE to send participants their way. This is a gross waste of our experience and a duplication of work across the city. At the same time we are being approached by other organisations across the UK who recognise our skill in training volunteers.

If you'd like to speak to a member of the SAVTE Team to discuss this issue then contact us on 0114 2536644 or savte@savte.org.uk

Further information - <http://savte.org.uk/>

Our annual report gives case studies of how beneficiaries have benefited as a result of SAVTE's work - <https://online.fliphtml5.com/yghsx/okaq/#p=1>

Please see Sabira, Shakewam and Fanda's stories in their own words.