



VCAS Members Consultation: Covid-19 Interim Response.

23rd March 2020

Overview.

In response to the ongoing Covid-19 Crisis and the potential impact on Sunderland's VCS, VCAS circulated a consultation with its members to ascertain the immediate effect this unprecedented crisis was having (or would have) on their own organisations and their service users.

As agreed at a conference meeting called by the Chief Executive of Sunderland City Council and attended by several key partners active in the Cities VCS community, VCAS agreed to share the outcomes of a consolidated consultation to allow all involved the opportunity to identify and address any adverse impact stemming from the closure of services and facilities throughout the City. VCAS shared the contents of its consultation with Sunderland City Council prior to its release.

The VCAS Survey was issued on the 19th March 2020. The survey was published via:

- 1/ Online Survey addressed to 392 contacts consisting of VCAS members and Contacts
- 2/ An urgent VCAS Newsletter was also released
- 3/ The survey was published on Twitter and Facebook
- 4/ Partners, who attended the meeting, were requested to circulate it to ensure that, as far as is possible to confirm, all VCS groups in the City received the Consultation.

The data provided in this summary represents the return from the VCAS report and does not reflect a consolidation of the VCS area arrangement survey that was also circulated.

Of the 392 initially contacted 130 recipients opened the consultation and 50 completed or partially completed the Consultation. Most of these responded immediately. I would add a caveat that many of these organisations are currently trying to deal with organisational/delivery issues, which they will obviously prioritise and their primary concern is not 'another survey'.

The following is summary of the returns we received.

Q3: Are you continuing to deliver services during the current Covid -19 Crisis?

- 64% of respondents stated that they were not delivering during the present crisis and are suspending their usual service delivery and many are looking at alternative ways to meet client needs.
- 27% are offering limited provision
- 13% are remaining open as of Friday 20th March
- 32% had “concerns about their ongoing provision”.

Some of the concerns focused on:

- Closure of facilities: Charity shops/heritage centre/community centres/ assets closed.
- Access to resources and staff/experts in these centres reduced or suspended
- Volunteer Capacity: Reliance on volunteers for these services/activities.
Many of the volunteers are over 70 years old and in at risk categories
- Transport for volunteers: The cancellation of transport and restrictions
- Home-working: Certain restrictions include Inadequate IT provision. Limited skills within the over 70s to access platforms/online etc.
- Consent issues for clients when working from home and over the phone. Confidentiality issues
- Loss of income: loss of income due to long term cancellation of events/activities/rental incomes/room hire
- Not enough resources/stock if client numbers increase due increase in demand
- Volunteer management

Q4: What services/activities are you still delivering? How is this likely to change?

Some of those 13% who were remaining open, indicated that they were continuing to provide the following services/support:

- Full day care, pick up service lunch, personal car ,full activities, drop off service
(NE Dementia Care)
- Transport if requires, but most bookings cancelled.
Sunderland Community Transport
- Still open for parcel collection 6 days, but this may change due to school closures and volunteer capacity levels.
Community activities are now on hold
Washington Community Food project
- 1:1 Advice
ICOS
Setting up COVID-19 community response team for Doxford Ward.
Practical support for people self isolating. Outreach youth work/1:1 support for young people and/or adults in crisis/ Lend a Hand Project
Box Project.
- Food Parcels
Sunderland Foodbank
- Telephone contact to those who are most isolated/vulnerable or frightened.
Face-to-face counselling at present (providing clients show no symptoms)
Centre still open for individual drop-ins/support.
All group activity cancelled
Newsletter going to 3,000 members
Face-to-face counselling may be offered over the phone
Centre may be closed to visitors
Staff may have to work from home
Sunderland and Durham Royal Society for the Blind
- Food parcels, drop-in centre, emotional, psychological, financial support. signposting to relevant agencies.
Peer support.

Veterans in Crisis

- Over the phone befriending service. Providing surplus food/meals on wheels
- Thursday/Friday Job Search. Support for families on low income with cleaning products. Helping families with children on free school meals.

Chance

- SMS WhatsApp support - emergency supplies for now

Action Foundation

- We are only open for food distribution (Food Bank, Greggs and Fayreshare) and computer access for this requiring to do their job search.

ELCAP

- We have expected around 500 - 600 users and visitors for the period up until end of April. This will have a direct impact on those individuals. They will be more isolated, less engaged and their mental health could be affected. Phone/volunteer networks needed. Alternative ways to engage.

Donnison School Heritage and Education Centre

Q5: What are your immediate concerns for your clients or users?

Respondents identified the two main areas of concern for their clients/users as:

1. Isolation at 38%
2. impact on Mental Health as 16%

Comments Included:

- We are just hoping our members stay well. We hope our manager and staff stay well, so they are able to look after members
- The social isolation, an inability to contact service providers is a concern
- Social isolation compounded by disability such as sight loss
- Our learners are elderly and vulnerable. Not all have local families, so we need to try and check on those.
- Food shortages and mental health
- Social isolation/depression/loneliness and lack of respite care for loved ones.
- Many are losing shifts or jobs because many are working through job agencies/self employed
- many will not understand the advice provided as it is in English -claiming universal credit has become much more difficult as phones are not being picked up after hours of waiting
Who is going to deliver supplies to them if they have to self-isolate?
- Boredom among children and young people-potential increase in anti social behaviour
- Vulnerable adults and children unable to access the support they need
- Children may be left at home through the day if parents have to work
- Children and young people going hungry
- Those over 70 and with underlying health issues who will due to being isolated may struggle to get any groceries, or cook for themselves and for whom social isolation will be a massive problem.
- Feeling disconnected and isolated - impacting on mental health and wellbeing - sense of loss and change, could lead to depression and anxiety. That they are unable to have practical needs met eg: shopping cooking, washing - support from carers being reduced. Extra pressure placed on carers within the groups due to reduction in external care provision.

Q6: What are your immediate concerns for your organisation?

Members concerns were expressed around the following issues:

- Wider impact of losing members and member organisations in the long term because of limited financial capacity and an inability to sustain services and organisations over a longer period
- More groups will close.
- A great number of the community members will be left to their own devices at the time of a crisis.
- Sustainability of smaller groups
- Unsupported volunteers
- Unable to support members through isolation and lack of contact
- Limited capacity to deploy and meet changing needs

On an organisational basis, comments included:

- The wider VCS community, particularly those whose activities are tied to specific outcomes and interventions, may struggle.
- Those that rely on income from paying customers through clubs/cafe.
- Those who depend on room hire/rental/events/activities on site
- Limited cash flow will put organisations under pressure

On Funding, Comments included:

- Some organisations may close if there is no injection of emergency funding
- Others will need funding or increased capacity to deal with an increase in demand
- Support through funding to redirect services/assets where they may be needed

On the future for member organisations:

- We are a very new charity and if we have no members coming to our centre we will run out of money for wages bus rent etc .and after all the hard work we have done to create our lovely centre we will have to close
- That we'll be forced to close and will end up in a state financially

“Financially it is potentially huge - as if we are unable to deliver our core services over a prolonged period of time what financial support from funders will be in place? We will need transitional funding support as we work to adapt and create new ways of meeting our service users needs, creating a new strategic response to the needs that will come from communities during and following the Coronavirus pandemic and potential impact on that. Support in new ways of working - accessing new digital streams to reach people and communicate with groups in alternative ways. Resources for care packages - to help keep people engaged and connected to each other and the groups. Unable to pay any salary to Director so impact on their financial stability and wellbeing.”

“In the event that we have no income and still have expenses, and as a charity we have limited reserves, we may have to lay off staff and may at worst case scenario, cease our charitable activities.”

Q7: What are your immediate concerns for the VCS Community?

Specific concerns include:

- Co-ordinating the sector, understanding what other partners are providing.
- Share resources, supporting new ways of working
- Support for vulnerable communities
- Many vital services are now closed, worried about lifeline services for vulnerable people and how they are signposted.
- Anxiety about the pressure placed on current staff and volunteers
- Financial strategic support
- Social isolation
- Cash flow crisis for those centres that are now closed
- We are concerned that this will see small charity closures - loss of real community resources

Q8: Have you any plans in place to maintain contact with your clients/users?

Respondents remain confident about continuing contact with clients/service users – largely by Social media with older members being contacted by phone and email.

Member's comments included:

- Women's groups using zoom/phone contact with clients
- Social Media networks and other platforms being used like Google Hangouts/ GoToMeeting/FaceBook Groups/What's App Groups
- Some are organising food deliveries
- Newsletters/Website updates/
- Phone Networks with volunteers/clients/users
- Virtual volunteer networks

Q9: Will this current crisis have an impact on Funding/cash flow?

48% of those that responded said that this current crisis would have a negative impact on funding.

20% of those that responded said there would be an immediate impact on cash flow of their organisations.

Comments included:

- We have families cancelling day care, loss of immediate income, We still have 25 members still attending.
- Delay delivering of programmes and projects although funding is secured (ESF – Others)
- This will affect unrestricted reserves
- We will lose £3- 4K/month revenue through closure.
- Our services to schools/colleges and teachers have been impacted
- We have three projects delayed. Huge impact on current financial situation
- Closure of charities

Q10: How can the VCS support and represent your concerns during this crisis?

The overwhelming responses indicated that:

29% needed support around funding/cash flow and the impact on funding streams/delivery of services.

26% general support

16% around information sharing

Comments included:

- Urging the Council to play a proactive role
- Co-ordinated effort across sectors.
- Campaign for funds to be made available to VCS organisations to avert crisis (Staffing Issues/Building costs)
- It is essential that Sunderland/s voluntary and community sector have an “umbrella” organisation to provide support to represent the interests of the sector.
- Continued information sharing across the sector for all groups to access. Need to understand the VCS role in line with government guidelines and the impact on the VCS community
- Representations to the local authority to make available emergency funding

Q11: Do you have any resources or capacity that could be redeployed to support other needs in the current crisis?

Responses included:

- **Sunderland Community Transport** have 3 minibuses
- We have lots of skills with crafts fine art and education. We could make up simple activity packs with basic instructions while resources allow. Although we are not trained counsellors, we spend a lot of time listening to people and building confidence. Personally, I would be happy to man phones or a helpdesk or support line if required – **Culture Creatives CIC**
- Vets in Crisis – We have clients that are willing to volunteer with other community services.
- Yes as I am not delivering face to face due to cancellations I have time to look at other ways to support our service users but also maybe become part of a city wide service provision whereby VCS organisations work together -eg: I have a car I could do deliveries of care packages, I have some creative resources that could be used to go into care packages or could create some creative resources that could be shared with other organisations for their beneficiaries. **Banyan Arts**
- We have a fully equipped kitchen(ex community cafe) that could be used to provide basic hot food. We have fridge /freezers that could be used to store food locally. As a trusted provider we have a great track record in engaging with the community. We have experience in recruiting/managing/supporting volunteers. We have the community library in the building - could be used to deliver books to isolated people (if that is how this crisis moves on). We have an experienced Board and Senior Management team with a range of skills and experience which might be helpful. Team have a range of skills and qualifications - Strategic and Operations management, Family Support, childcare, education, Trainer, safeguarding, housing, advice. **SHARP**

Many are currently still reviewing their position and assessing what may be possible for them as organisations with a view to reassessing what is possible. However some have responded.