

# Workshop B: Economic Models that Work / Skills & Employment

## LACVS - LOCAL Project Strategic Launch: A Manifesto for Change



**Facilitated by Garth Hodgkinson, Chief Officer, Community CVS Blackburn with Darwen**  
**Notes taken by Rachel Coupe, LACVS LOCAL project**  
**13 participants**

### **Stakeholders identified were:**

LEP/ Lancashire Skills Hub, Paul Hannett (apprenticeships), Preston Community Network, CVSs and social prescribers, Lancashire Adult Learning (LAL), Prince's Trust, Red Rose Recovery, UK Skills Academy, and local authorities such as Preston's work club run by Sue Little & Marc Dunne. The DWP wants to connect with all the VCFSEs, but communication needs to be better.

Employability projects & skills training are being delivered by WEA, Lancashire Women, AFC Fylde Community Foundation (Fylde) and all Lancashire football club community trusts, Calico (Burnley), Selnet / Active Lancashire and their partners (Preston & Pendle) including Beanstalk and PVC, Positive Smiles (Blackburn). In Preston: Foxtan Centre, Preston Muslim Forum, Sahara in Preston, Pukar Disability Resource Centre, Preston Community Hub, Intact, Preston Digital Co-operative.

An Inclusive Future CIC deliver mental health peer support for the ICB. They try to address community gaps using their experience, they are enablers, they will apply for funding but can also bring partnerships together if that's appropriate.

The Community Foundation wants to connect with small VCFSEs. Reaching Communities from The National Lottery Fund have a very wide remit. The contact will be Claire Compton for the North West soon. They have key priorities but these change, there will be a new strategy from June. Their local officers know their area well and they support volunteering projects too. They don't have enough money, so they try to fund a wide range, there used to be 80% of applicants got the money applied for and now it's only 40%.

The ICB collaborates with the local authority and health leaders delivering into neighbourhoods. They work with DWP to help the disadvantaged looking at workforce strategy - how do they take advantage of volunteering and apprenticeships?

**Specific barriers to accessing support were discussed.** There are projects that specifically help ex-offenders, care-leavers young people and "NEETS" – councils are developing strategies around young people, but support is also needed for those aged over 24 who can get left out of provision (this is available in Fylde). Employers need to be encouraged to sign the care covenant to support care-leavers into work. LAL offer SWOT programmes, courses in EAL, Mental Health & Wellbeing and into volunteering.

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### **Examples of co-operatives that support people into work:**

- Retrofit Plus is a new co-operative formed on Brookfield estate (Preston), bringing together experienced tradespeople, young people looking to start a career in retrofit, and the local community. Their first project is to refit the local community centre.
- “Deeds Not Words”, a co-operative to support women back into employment, for example when they have been in custody; they make and sell things.

Flying Start gives business start up advice and there are skills bootcamps being run by various orgs across the county

Private sector companies who have engaged with employment projects to help people into work in Fylde are BAE, Kepak, Fox’s Biscuits and Westinghouse (Springfields). LAL have a relationship with the railways and offer courses to get people into jobs with them.

### **Issues to overcome:**

- there is a lack of support for marginalised people who can get bullied on work placements, they need small groups and a forum.
- Collaborating can be hard – organisations all want to do their own thing
- Links between private businesses, public sector and VCFSE are missing, we can do better.

### **Notable examples of VCFSE training and job support agencies in a district or across Lancashire 14:**

- Gillette Environmental (Fylde) take on lads at risk of offending
- Sahara Preston support women, particularly those from a BME background. They get loads of people into work, it’s amazing.
- Idle Women (Hyndburn) achieve loads on an incredibly low budget. They built a narrowboat from scratch which became a platform, going around Lancashire, then they made a book. At their core is support for female refugees and survivors of domestic violence who have heartbreaking back stories. They share their skill sets and help them to get driving licenses to empower them. They have an allotment to grow food and the Community Foundation are trying to link them with Booths to sell their Chai tea commercially. These women have no concept of their value, they need advocacy to big them up and support from infrastructure services on things such as how to write an invoice.

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- An Inclusive Future CIC facilitated a peer support group in school for year 6 to 7 transition, trialled in Ormskirk. Year 11 and 12 mentors were trained up by Merseyside Youth Association. The training was delivered with a mental health twist and it worked so well that they did a community-based model with referrals from the NHS. They supported people with depression, those coping with bereavement, those released from mental health services etc. Some of the beneficiaries later came back to work for them - it's true coproduction and it works with proper support.
- "Seeing is Believing" where donors are taken out to visit projects that need funding, it sometimes changes their minds about what they want to support. There is a need to help with evidencing the impact of VCFSE organisations.

There needs to be more advantage taken of large projects to get local people into work. To this end, Calico have been commissioned to look at apprenticeships in the construction industry e.g. where are they doing the education part, who are the end users? It needs to link up better and the recruitment process is too short a timescale; when we know these big projects are coming (e.g. Eden project), we need to start building the skills so that they have a ready workforce.

Devolution may offer an opportunity to look at this with greater consistency, supporting people on their first steps, tackling their mental health before they can sign up for courses etc, economically inactive people in particular need this support. Sometimes there is a perception that there are 14 districts and a 15th one called "Lancashire" whereas it is only the sum of its parts. There is another layer beneath the districts with Parish and Town councils, some of which have quite a lot of "clout" but they can be parochial in their outlook.

LAL would welcome an improvement in joined-up thinking that is currently lacking. They believe they are best-placed to provide simple skills for Health & Wellbeing e.g. falls prevention training or chair-based exercise, but it is hard to get the message out due to all GP practices having different social prescribing referral pathways and social prescribers can also be employed by the local authority or CVSs.

It can be hard to know how to get a contract or grant from a commissioner such as the ICB plus there is not as much money around now. The VCFSE Alliance could ask for their priorities and then they could help the ICB to deliver results e.g. "Tell us how you can keep people away from A&E".

It can be a free for all when everyone is bidding for the same money. If the commissioners were able to say specifically what they want, that might be avoided.

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### Ways in which access to volunteering can increase a person's opportunities to gain employment:

- Improves mental health and well-being
- It's a two-way process; volunteers are getting back valuable transferable skills but this is not always communicated so people need to be helped to tell the tale.
- Through volunteering you can try out different things and it is flexible it can be from one hour per week to much more
- Young people may do volunteering as part of the Duke of Edinburgh award for example, whilst at school but Volunteering is not attractive to young people as they need an income so it needs to be sold to them - it will give them an edge. Young people can have qualifications but no experience, we need to make this outcome of volunteering explicit. COVID hit the age group 18- to 21-year-olds for hobbies and volunteering so they lack the transferable skills you get from playing in a sports team for example.
- Research shows that young people don't feel connected to their communities, volunteering would do this if we could get them involved. We need to find ways to recognise and reward volunteering/participation e.g. awards or certificates and not just YP, there was no recognition for the volunteers who delivered food during Covid.
- It was asked if Lancashire Volunteer Partnership could help with the above but it was explained that they don't work with the VCFSE sector as the police and NHS fund them. They only recruit volunteers into public sector roles e.g. befriending or libraries. It makes it difficult to recruit volunteers in areas where they have a strong presence which is why "Preston Volunteers" is welcomed to help VCFSE organisations in Preston.

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### Further gaps in this area:

- Work experience needs improving. Is it really useful to keep everyone in education or training until they are 18? Saturday jobs are difficult to find so we have older young people in their 20s with little experience. There are gaps in the offer to these young people as projects designed for 16–21-year-olds are not attractive to those in their later twenties.
- People are being forced to work until they are older but there are skills shortages because their skills are outdated.
- Recruitment crisis in Health & Social Care, people are willing to pay to come to the UK to be a care assistant. We need to create better career paths into H&SC. Preston Council are working with RPH to help them recruit.
- Community wealth building can help with this
- Care leavers struggle more to get into work, again the care covenant was mentioned, there is an app which businesses can sign up to.
- More help is needed to support those with disabilities or disengaged. They often want to work but are economically inactive.
- Help to become self-employed. We now have Flying Start but years ago each area had an Enterprise Hub and these haven't been fully replaced.

### Is a grant programme needed and what things do we need to lobby for?

- There's a problem caused by COVID, children have lost social skills and neurodiverse young people need help into employment.
- Is there a true VCFSE lobby to get what we need? There are key things missing between the local authorities and the VCFSE sector - a disconnect between what's needed and what's funded. The criteria for UKSPF are the same as they were for ESF and the same as 15 years ago. To address challenges they need to think, "What can the sector do?" Some think we are cheap or free, but we are simply cost effective. We are best placed to deliver to our communities. Our problem is the perception of the sector and understanding what the challenges are e.g. if we have volunteers then the service must be free and doesn't cost anything to provide therefore don't need funding.
- E.g. Some people receive under 12 hrs of paid care from nurses in their home, doing their shopping or befriending them etc it would cost less to use the sector, but it is more appropriate for that person.
- Maybe the sector doesn't promote itself enough. As a perfect example of how it should work, one organisation was funded by LSCFT to deliver mental health peer support. They submitted their proposal and got funded so now their staff are fully integrated into the system, it is good for their reputation, the NHS are impressed, it works well, and everyone benefits.
- Could there be a volunteering infrastructure bid in collaboration with the ICB to create volunteer partnerships at a place-based level?
- Digital solutions to help volunteers navigate the system, more at a local level is better than national.
- Volunteering is a stepping stone to employability and skills.

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### SUMMARY:

Workshop attendees identified several strategic partners and as well as VCFSE grassroots organisations that it was thought would be positive influences to have around the table, several partners expressed the desire to work more closely with volunteers and VCFSE sector. There were many examples of excellent VCFSE sector projects named that deliver services making significant supportive contributions but who perhaps underestimate the value of their work and are not sufficiently recognized.

There are a number schemes to help young people into employment, but it is thought that there is a lack of support for people over 24yrs of age. This is especially true of marginalised individuals who have their own additional barriers and those who are currently economically inactive due to disability and other factors. It is thought encouraging young people to volunteer would enable them to gain experience and transferable skills for employment as well as helping them feel better connected and have a better understanding of their communities.

The private sector employment contribution in Fylde was mentioned as a positive example. More assistance is needed to help business start-ups such as Flying Start and advice & skills bootcamps, but mention was made of the changes impacting on business enterprise partnerships and hubs. It was suggested that there seems to be a lack of joined up thinking, consistency and connectivity around training, education and employment support.

We need better intelligence and forward planning to take advantage of opportunities as they arise by getting the local workforce skilled and prepared.

Is there a disconnect between VCFSE and local authorities on what is needed and what is funded e.g. the criteria for UKSPF allocations? It is thought that the public sector perceives the VCFSE to be cheap or free, it is important to change this perception of the sector.

Other gaps identified were the lack of experience that young people have of employment and outdated skills of people who are having to work into late 60's is creating a skills gap. The recruitment crisis in the Health & Social care sector requires better career paths and prospects; how can the VCFSE sector provide services to support further non clinical care at home?

Digital solutions are needed to help volunteers navigate the system at a local level. It has been recognised what the VCFSE sector has always known that volunteering is a practical stepping stone to employability and skills. Could there be a volunteering infrastructure bid in collaboration with the ICB to create volunteer partnerships at a place-based level? It can be difficult getting contracts/grants from ICB without knowing their priorities.

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### Economic Models that Work / Skills & Employment Workshop B – Potential Action Points:

- i. Explore strategies to improve lines of communication for the VCFSE sector with other agencies.
- ii. VCFSE projects and organisations need expert help and support with marketing and promotion of their significant achievements that helps evidence and highlight the true impact of VCFSE services.
- iii. Consider the campaign for employers to pledge to the Care Leaver Covenant, as care leavers have a greater struggle in finding employment.
- iv. Ensure LOCAL explores multi sector collaborations, including the private sector.
- v. Explore avenues of/for business support for the VCFSE sector.
- vi. Campaign for equality of investment for the VCFSE sector.
- vii. Consider collaborative approaches to support young people to participate in volunteering.
- viii. Advocating for workplace training and lifelong learning to support an aging workforce.
- ix. Support Community Wealth Building approaches.

### FURTHER INFORMATION & LINKS:

- Flying Start  
<https://www.boostbusinesslancashire.co.uk/services/flying-start>
- Preston Volunteers  
<https://www.communitycvs.org.uk/volunteer/preston-volunteers/>
- Care Leaver Covenant  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/care-leaver-covenant--2>
- VCFSE Sector Manifesto For Lancashire 14  
<https://www.locallancashire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/A-VCFSE-Sector-Manifesto-for-Lancashire-2022-6.pdf>
- Media from the event  
<https://www.locallancashire.org.uk/strategic-launch/>