

In the last three years The VCS Voices Hub have carried out many worthwhile activities.

Some highlights have included:

- The construction, and continual refinement, of a VCS representative support and feedback system
- Twice yearly VCS representation and leadership events
- The growth of a VCS Short-Term representatives bank
- Two VCS conferences; in 2010 we had Kevin Curley of NAVCA as the key note speaker
- Providing leadership in VCS consultation
- The production of eleven editions of The Voice

Worcestershire's Compact Award Winners

Congratulations to the Friends of St George's Park, Wyre Forest District Council and Vestia Housing who won the top Compact Award at a special ceremony celebrating "working together". Altogether there were 38 nominations of practical effective working partnerships between the VCS and statutory authorities in Worcestershire.



Partnership Improvement Programme (PIP)

In October The Voice reported on Worcestershire's involvement in this national programme which is designed to improve cross-sector partnership working between local authorities and the local VCS. A sector-wide invitation for participants brought together ten VCS workers. Participants from the statutory sector included senior officers from the County Council, District Councils and the NHS. Three sessions have taken place facilitated through IVAR, The Institute for Voluntary Action Research.

It was decided to focus on commissioning which will become even more important as statutory bodies look to others to deliver services. Further work will take place, identified objectives are: to develop a common understanding of how cross sector commissioning will work in the new world, and to increase VCS engagement with all stages of commissioning processes. When the action plan has been developed it will be circulated through WIC and WIC members. For more information contact Cathy Clement on Catherine_clement@sky.com

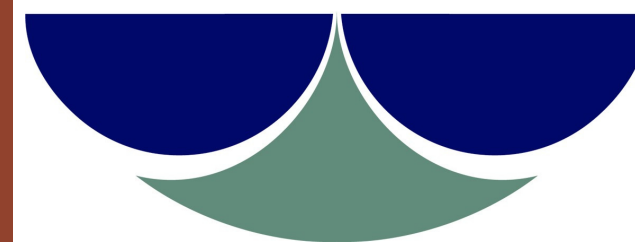
Chairs Report Continued ...

This will be a real challenge – many of us are going to be forced to review, and perhaps change, the way we operate. We may need to build new relationships and find new ways to support our work. Trustees and workers must be pro-active in planning what they want to do and how the work can be delivered long before grants or contracts come to an end. Don't be too inward looking, think about those with whom you might cooperate and don't forget that the members of WIC are there to provide advice and information.

WIC Members Are:

- Age Concern Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
- Community Action Wyre Forest
- Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Droitwich Spa and Rural Council for Voluntary Service
- Community Action Malvern and District
- Pershore Volunteer Centre
- Evesham Volunteer Centre
- Worcester Volunteer Centre
- Worcestershire Association of Voluntary Organisations in Community Care
- Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Services
- Worcestershire Racial Equality Council

WORCESTERSHIRE
SOURCE OF EXCELLENCE



Note from the WIC Chair

2011 is going to be a challenging year for many of us in the VCS. The rollout of the Big Society within the context of massive spending cuts will have an impact.

The Big Society is an idea not a plan. The VCS is already strong in Worcestershire. There is a history of responding to local need and many partnerships work well. Even more will be expected in the future.

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To submit copy for The Voice please contact
Jim Smith
wavocc@btconnect.com
Tel: 01905 612726

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Social Return on Investment.
News on the Local Economy Partnership (LEPs).

VCS Involvement in Worcestershire Partnership

The new smaller Partnership Board met for the first time in December. Councillor Adrian Hardman is the newly elected chair. At present the Board does not have any VCS representation though it was agreed that the sector needs to be effectively engaged. A letter from WIC was brought to the Board. WIC recognised the need for the restructure but requested that due its diversity there should be more than a single representative; the sector should be allowed to choose its own representatives.

The Board agreed that the VCS and the Business sectors should be responsible for selecting their own representatives subject to those representatives being able to meet the expectations and characteristics of the role. Michael Clarke will act as an independent person to engage with the VCS. It was also decided that a single representative would be appointed in the first instance, but that this would be kept under review. WIC members will circulate further information as it becomes available.

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

VCS Representatives' Listening and Leadership Event
'VCS Representation: Facilitating a Voice in the Big Society.'
Thursday 17th March 12pm -2pm including a working lunch.
At the offices of Age Concern Herefordshire and Worcestershire
Malvern Gate Worcester WR2 4BN
For details contact: Jim Smith at wavocc@btconnect.com Tel: 01905 612726



Worcestershire has a new partnership, a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), to drive forward economic development locally. The LEP will provide the strategic leadership needed to stimulate economic growth. The LEP does not have resources of its own but can bid for money from a variety of sources to support its work. Sectors including business, the public sector, the VCS and social enterprises all have a key part to play in the LEP's establishment and success. For more information on the Worcestershire LEP visit <http://worcestershirelep.org/>

Over the next few months WIC will be considering how the VCS and social enterprises can best engage with and influence the work of the LEP and other emerging strategic partnerships locally. For more information on this work contact the WIC Coordinator, Hasnah Sheriff at:

hasnahs@comfirst.org.

Opportunities in the Big Society?

Front-line groups and organisations delivering local services are the key players in the Government's Big Society reform agenda. A consultation closed this month on how 'civil society' can be supported to improve the lives of fellow citizens. This excited the sector and a wide range of contributions have been made. Some of the ideas/comments have included:

- Big Society is not a new idea - many VCS groups and organisations have been working to build a more cohesive society including working with those most in need.
- There was support for 'pro-bono work' and employer supported volunteering
- Volunteer centres have a vital role to play in all types of volunteering in particular in a brokering role and promoting best practice
- There was concern about the anticipated reduction in grant funding
- Bursaries are a useful way for groups and organisations to access technical or specialist support or develop more

social entrepreneurship. But they can only be part of the solution

- There can be economy of scale savings if groups and organisations work more closely together or even merge. External facilitation is often needed to achieve this.
- Online access is very useful but there still needs to be a 'human gateway'

'The Big Society is not a new idea'

The Government has identified that infrastructure organisations such as the organisations that make up WIC, are well placed to help develop new skills, partnerships and models so that frontline groups are able to deliver services.

Social Return on Investment

An interesting and creative partnership initiative started this autumn. Two VCS groups and a social enterprise have been working with the County Council to develop a relatively simple way of enabling

VCS groups to demonstrate the broader social impact they are having on their communities. This is known as Social Return on Investment (SROI). The intended outcome of the work is for there to be, in Worcestershire, an agreed way of demonstrating wider achievements when applying for grants or other funding.

SROI is a framework for understanding, managing and measuring the outcomes of a group's activities. It can include all types of outcomes – social, economic and environmental, and was developed from social accounting and cost benefit analysis. It is distinct from other approaches in that it places a monetary value on outcomes so that they can be added up and compared with the investment made. As finances become tighter SORI can be particularly important in enabling local groups to demonstrate value via their impact on individuals, groups or their local community.

For more information contact Suzy James, WCC VCS Coordinator on 01905 728650 or SJames2@worcestershire.gov.uk

WIC's Live online training and business advice

During 2010, as part of the business advice and training provided by WIC, we have been able to harness developments in technology to provide live online training/'Webinars' offering continuous professional development opportunities and business advice for charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises in Worcestershire and making learning and business advice more accessible.

To date Webinars on subjects such as Business Planning, Understand and Use an Outcomes Focus, Prince 2 Project Management and Writing Better Bids have been accessed by a total of 74 individuals, who are either paid employees or volunteers.

The initiative was developed in response to feedback that passive online support (such as providing tool kits and self help pages) do not get well used, yet at the same time sector organisations wanted to access support on line. Live web based interaction brings with it the following added value: the paid staff and volunteers can access training and advice from a location of their choosing, as a minimum, beneficiaries only need access to a personal computer and a broadband connection, it achieves a reduction in the carbon footprint, as both users and service providers do not need to travel to one another, there is minimum disruption to the working day, as there is no wasted travelling time – a key feature in rural areas.

Feedback from those taking part, often for the first time, indicates a keen enthusiasm for more online learning. Also, a survey carried out by the University of Worcester in August 2010 on a sample of voluntary and community groups found 42% want access to online advice and training. The benefits are that it is convenient, effective and cost efficient. For further details contact Sophie Mead:

Telephone: 01684 312734
Email: sophiem@comfirst.org.uk

Goodbye

Steph' Jones and Jenny Taylor, of Worcestershire Partnership, have now left for new roles. WIC would like to thank them for their support of the sector over the last few years.

The End of Capacity Builders

Capacity Builders is finishing at the end of March. The organisation was set up to improve the advice and support available to community groups and charities. Worcestershire has benefited from some of this funding.

Each year it conducted a survey and for the fourth survey in a row it found that infrastructure organisations have seen a rise in the demand for their services from frontline VCS groups and organisations.

Income generation, funding advice and building new partnerships remain the areas of support most demanded. There has also been an increase in demand for advice around making staff reductions, financial management support and lobbying / campaigning advice.

In the past three years The Volunteering Hub have worked to provide infrastructure to volunteer managers to further develop their knowledge and skills.

The work of the Hub have included five Volunteer Forums enabling volunteer managers to network and discuss current volunteering topics. A Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire was produced and is still in use.

A number of reports came from the forums :

- Relevance, Link and Legacy of the Olympics 2012
- Rural Volunteering
- Volunteering for all
- Volunteering into work
- Your Future-Generation Y

If you would like to see any of the above documents, or would like to discuss WIC's work in this respect, please contact your local volunteer centre, details are held at http://www.winc.org.uk/do_you_manage_volunteers_resources