Better Together VCS Forum – 7 February 2023

# Action Notes

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| Agenda Item | Key Issues | Actions | Responsibility |
| **Welcome & introductions** | Kate Burrows welcomed everyone to the meeting at the Pioneering Care Centre offices. Introductions were made and Carol Gaskarth gave a particular welcome. 13 people participated.  Apologies were received from: Robyn Holmes, Age UK; Andrea Hobbs, Association of Teesdale Day Clubs; Grace Crawford, UTASS; Gail McGee, Healthwatch; Clare Singlewood, Humankind; Naomi Stevens, CDCF; Melanie Bear PCP; Emma Crawford Moore, Family Action; Joanne Appleby, OASES; Peter Richards, Moving On; Abby Thompson, DCA |  |  |
| **Focus on Refugees and Asylum Seekers**  **VCS Support in County Durham - what are we doing, and can we do more?** | Donna Whitfield, DCC Humanitarian Support Manager; Joanne Thorns, [Communities Together Durham](https://communitiestogetherdurham.org.uk/) project officer for Refugees and Asylum Seekers; and Tresor Bukasa, British Red Cross gave a [joint presentation](https://www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk/better-together-vcs-forum-meetings) on the five key Humanitarian Support Programmes operating in the County (See [presentation](https://www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk/better-together-vcs-forum-meetings) for details).  The main challenge is that in County Durham we have very little experience or support infrastructure for asylum seekers. The VCS have supported the resettlement schemes for refugees, largely through the Churches, Durham Christian Partnership, and Durham City of Sanctuary.  Providing appropriate support for the dispersal scheme for asylum seekers is extremely challenging as individuals will be housed in private landlord accommodation scattered across the county often in the least affluent and less accessible areas without good transport links or access to internet. The British Red Cross can provide independent support for individual service users and work with schools if invited. They can also provide interpreters in a variety of languages. Organisations must be careful not to give ‘advice’ as this may affect an asylum claim. Legal support can be obtained by designated law firms – see list of providers.  At present there is little information about numbers of asylum seekers coming to County Durham but there could be up to 2600 to be housed in due course.  A Migration and Cohesion Multi-Agency Group meets quarterly to monitor the situation.  We will need to look at appropriate drop in venues in the county as now these are only provided in Newcastle. Support will also be needed with learning English.  If you can offer support as an organisation or need support in working with asylum seekers and refugees the Key Contacts are:  Tresor Bukasa [Tbukasa@redcross.org.uk](mailto:Tbukasa@redcross.org.uk)  Joanne Thorns [joanne.thorns@durham.anglican.org](mailto:joanne.thorns@durham.anglican.org)  Donna Whitfield [Donna.Whitfield@durham.gov.uk](mailto:Donna.Whitfield@durham.gov.uk) | 1. Presentation to be put on [Better Together Page](https://www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk/better-together) of DCA website 2. List of legal firms offering support in County Durham to be provided. 3. Membership of Migration and Cohesion Multi-Agency Group to be provided | IHS  Donna Whitfield/IHS  DW/IHS |
| **Poverty & Health Alliance – feedback from workshop and next steps** | Carol Gaskarth feedback on the work to explore a Poverty & Health Alliance for County Durham. Thirty-eight organisations attended the VCS Consultation workshop in Durham Town Hall on 10th January. Priority themes were identified and there was general support for exploring this further, but organisations lacked capacity to invest a lot of time at the present.  Phase 2 £450K bid submitted to Lottery by PCP to develop the vision for system change, employ a worker to take this work forward and also explore developing a [Poverty Truth Commission](https://poverty-truth.org.uk/) for County Durham to ensure that we are listening and responding to people with lived experience. |  |  |
| **Partnerships Update** | * Safeguarding   Kate reported on the pre-meeting Safeguarding discussion. Interest in Prevent training tailored to the VCS will be explored. Ensuring that all safeguarding training uses accessible language, focusses on building confidence for all staff and volunteers and uses case-studies of lived experience to help to bring it alive.  Organisations are encouraged to inform the Better Together network if they are planning training /events around safeguarding which could involve other organisations.   * Multiply Programme   Kate reported that this programme around numeracy skill development runs alongside the UKSP funding and will focus on talking to employers about the numeracy of their employees. Helen Radcliffe, DCC Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning is leading on this: [Helen.Radcliffe@durham.gov.uk](mailto:Helen.Radcliffe@durham.gov.uk) | 1. Abby to pursue the Prevent training for VCS organisations 2. Share training around Safeguarding with each other | AT  All |
| **Information Sharing** | Members were given the opportunity to share any information. |  |  |
| **Date of Next Meeting** | The next meeting will be the **Policy Conference Friday 21st April 9.30-12.30 Durham Town Hall** |  |  |