

Spotlight

# The Power of Local

Featuring:

Dwellbeing Shieldfield  
Chopwell Regeneration CIO

Pages 4 and 8

Also in this issue

Page 6  
Gateshead Volunteer Centre

Page 18  
Building confidence and capacity  
in funding

Cover photo (credit Matthew Pickering) A mix of people gather at a small community festival in Shieldfield. Two women are playing drums

# Contents

Introduction by Lisa Goodwin, Chief Executive	3
Spotlight: Dwellbeing Shieldfield	4
Gateshead Volunteer Centre: Meet Marie Wisson	6
Tyneside Papers: A poem by Rowan McCabe	7
Spotlight: Chopwell Regeneration CIO	8
Haref Allies: The Value of Keeping it Local	10
Mapping Local Advocacy Services	12
Families through Crisis - Harnessing the Power of Local	14
Working in Partnership - the Value of Local Relationships	15
Cost of Living Crisis: Supporting our Local Communities	16
The Power of Supporting a Local Charitable Company	17
Building Confidence and Capacity in Funding	18

## About this magazine

Connected Voice is published four times a year. We aim to make sure all information is correct and up to date but we do not accept liability for any mistakes that may inadvertently appear. Views and opinions in this magazine are not necessarily those of Connected Voice.

Images: as part of our commitment to accessibility, we describe images for those using screen readers.

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## Issue 11: The Power of Local

In this issue exploring the 'The Power of Local', we hear from two recently formed organisations, Dwellbeing Shieldfield and Chopwell Regeneration CIO, about how they support their local communities and the inspiring difference they have made in such a short space of time.

Vicki Harris shares how the Haref Allies have helped to address health inequalities in our local ethnically minoritised communities across Newcastle and Gateshead, and how their ambitions are growing thanks to the new Haref Allies membership offer.

Lisa Goodwin reflects on the benefits of keeping services local, the opportunities created through

partnerships and how contracts can act as a barrier to partnership working.

We also hear about a new advocacy mapping project that will improve knowledge of local services and build relationships, and we take a look at one successful partnership project - Families through Crisis - that combines local knowledge to offer a holistic service.

Jack Summerside speaks with Newcastle Community Asset Trust about how they changed their funding strategy to be more successful with grant applications, and Giovanni Spatuzzi shares a few ideas from Connected Voice about how we can support one another through the cost of living crisis ●

# The Power of Local

**Lisa Goodwin**  
Chief Executive



## We are here to amplify the voices of those small organisations doing good locally

**Our AGM this year had the theme the Power of Local, and we wanted to highlight and celebrate some of that community power in this edition of our magazine.**

Voluntary and community organisations are mostly very local in focus. Most of Connected Voice's member organisations cover an area the size of a neighbourhood. Because they are small it is sometimes more difficult for them to get their voices heard, and to spare the time and resources to engage in the bigger issues outside their immediate area of work. We are here to amplify the voices of those small organisations doing good locally.

But small doesn't mean powerless. A specific focus on a local area or a particular community of interest can mean that organisations have a clear mission that doesn't get diluted by competing priorities. We heard at the AGM from Chopwell Regeneration Group and Dwellbeing – and I was really inspired by the amount of things they have managed to support and

develop locally in a relatively short time. Both organisations bring people together, with a common aim of making things better in their local communities. I'm sure you will enjoy reading about what they have been up to.

It has been good to see the idea of local come back into fashion as a result of the pandemic. Organisations in the public sector have come to value and invest in local services again. But with the cost of living crisis that is now upon us, even their best efforts will be unlikely to be able to fund and support local VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise) organisations to a level that enables them to meet needs. The voluntary and community sector has always seen the first warning signs, indicating the issues of poverty and inequality as soon as they emerge. This current crisis, which has already taken away the 'luxury' of travel for many people, means that the power of local is more valuable than ever ●

**Photo (credit Matthew Pickering): A group of children and two adults take part in arts and crafts at the Shieling Design Festival with Dwellbeing Sheildfield**



# Spotlight: Dwellbeing Shieldfield

**Hannah Marsden**  
Programme Coordinator



Flourishing together

**Dwellbeing Shieldfield aims to help community members to play an active role in shaping life in Shieldfield.**

**One theory about the name 'Shieldfield' is that it was once a shieling ground, where people would come and graze their livestock in the summer months. Shielings were specific to the location in which they were built - created using local knowledge, skills and materials. For Dwellbeing, Shieling is a concept and action - a powerful tool to use to think about community-use of Shieldfield's public spaces and creating new community spaces that are built from the ground up, using Shieldfield's natural ecology and drawing upon its people, materiality and histories.**

## What does your organisation do?

Dwellbeing Shieldfield is a diverse community group and cooperative for people of all ages and backgrounds who live, work and play in Shieldfield. Our aim is for community members to play an active role in shaping life in Shieldfield.

We do this by building community knowledge about the issues that affect this neighbourhood. Members share skills and experiences through social, educational and creative activities such as group walks, coffee meet-ups, planting and growing food, youth activities, and making improvements to our neighbourhood. This is particularly important in a neighbourhood that has experienced disinvestment in its social spaces and services in recent years.

In April we celebrated one year since setting up as a Community Benefit Society (CBS). Prior to becoming constituted we undertook over three years of research. We worked with residents using participatory approaches to build knowledge together about the issues that affected them. Through regular community meetings, creative workshops and public events, we found that residents are increasingly concerned about the long-term future of the estate, fearing that the close proximity of the city centre will create

development pressures which could displace existing residents. We also found a wealth of passion, skills and creativity within Shieldfield's communities and an appetite to work together to address these challenges.

Our participatory process has shaped our working practices and methods, our programme, aims and organisational structure. Many participants from the research phase have taken on roles in the organisation such as Stewards (our board of Directors), working group volunteers, paid staff members and trainees.

## Tell us about your key projects?

We support people under three programmes:

### 1. Shieling Programme

The Shieling Programme is responsible for the public realm aspects of Dwellbeing's work, including food growing, creating and sustaining community spaces, as well as building knowledge and engagement around the issues of food security, sustainable and participatory forms of building, land, planning and urban development. It is run by a working group of residents alongside Shieldfield Art Works.

### 2. Shieldfield Youth Programme

The Shieldfield Youth Programme is developed by Dwellbeing Shieldfield and The NewBridge Project in collaboration with young



Photo top left (credit Matthew Pickering): a group of children sit on the grass drawing on a large piece of paper as part of the Shieling Design Festival.

Photo top right: Two older women wearing masks are planting garlic on the winter solstice.



people living in Shieldfield. It was officially launched in spring 2021 and has so far engaged over 60 local young people through weekly sessions at The Shieldfield Centre and regular detached youth work out and about on the estate.

The programme creates a space for young people to come together in the place where they live, to build new friendships, develop their skills and talents, and to explore new ways of thinking and doing things together. It empowers people to become active members of the local community and instils values of solidarity, social and economic justice, creativity and activism.

### 3. Flourishing Together

At the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown in Spring 2020 we began weekly online 'check-ins', which now continue in-person as a way for members to support each other. We also host weekly walks that have a focus on fun, fresh air, exercise and communing with nature, as well as day trips to local places of interest. These self-organised gathering spaces create important moments of reflection and sharing of ordinary life. They provide space to talk about wellbeing, to build friendships and

for skill-sharing and education.

Through all of our activities we embrace a community spirit and work towards flourishing together.

### What do people say about your organisation?

"I like Dwellbeing because we want to make a positive impact within the community. Dwellbeing brings people who are isolated together and helps them to take action in what they see as an issue. I have made many friends through Dwellbeing and can collaborate with others on ideas and learning something new." - Mahamat Yunis, Shieling Trainee.

### How has Connected Voice supported you?

Connected Voice worked with us to establish our policies and set up new finance and payroll systems, including providing free training in book-keeping software. The team worked at a pace which worked for our staff, stewards and volunteers so that everyone could feel confident with our new processes and responsibilities as an organisation. Connected Voice continues to provide payroll services and ongoing support with our financial management, for which we are incredibly grateful! ●

**“I like the youth programme because of the kindness and the trips we go on**

Young person aged 10

**“The youth programme is good because we turn up and get to try lots of different things**

Young person aged 9

# Gateshead Volunteer Centre

## Meet Marie - Gateshead Volunteering Development Officer

The new Gateshead Volunteer Centre is being run by Connected Voice and funded by Gateshead Council. For Gateshead residents, the Volunteer Centre provides opportunities that help people to find purpose, build skills and confidence, and increase wellbeing. For Gateshead organisations, the Volunteer Centre helps them to promote volunteering opportunities and provide valuable peer support around managing volunteers.

Since the launch in April, we have been working behind the scenes to get everything set up. We're promoting volunteering opportunities ('Ways to Help') through the [OurGateshead](#) community website and we've been encouraging organisations to share their 'Requests for Help'. There are now more than 60 opportunities listed.

Kate Marshall, Gateshead Council's volunteer officer, has been providing support around managing our volunteering database, delivering training and developing good practice guidance for organisations.

This week, we're delighted to welcome our new Volunteering Development Officer, Marie Wisson. Marie will be providing face-to-face support to residents who need additional support to help them volunteer, and to local voluntary and community organisations that need support with their volunteering opportunities. Marie will be available at a number of community venues across Gateshead.

We will be providing regular updates about our volunteering support in Gateshead in our regular email bulletins: [www.connectedvoice.org.uk/newsletters](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/newsletters)

If you would like to speak with Marie directly, please email:

[marie.wisson@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:marie.wisson@connectedvoice.org.uk)



Photo: Marie, a smiling young woman

"Hello, my name is Marie and I'm your new Gateshead Volunteering Development Officer. I enjoy encouraging people to be confident in trying new experiences, to embark on personal adventures and have the confidence in themselves in order to make extraordinary things happen.

I'm excited to be working back in glorious Gateshead where I spent 12 years in Gateshead Council's Arts Development Team. I worked with communities of all shapes and sizes during this time, with cultural volunteers and volunteer project participants alongside artists and creative folk. I have done everything from cooking soup in community centres as part of an intergenerational community cohesion project to persuading Gateshead residents to become giant sea creatures for the Tall Ships Crew Parade. More recently I've been the Volunteers Manager for Durham Cathedral where it has been my privilege to work alongside 750 incredible volunteers who enhance 100 different roles.

My own main volunteering commitment is with the Beaver Scouts, supporting an energetic Riverbank of 6-8 year olds. My two children both joined the Scouting movement some years ago and I started as a parent helper and then got hooked on helping and seeing the children develop in their self-esteem and independence.

I look forward to meeting and working with you."

# Tyneside Papers

## A poem by Rowan McCabe about Connected Voice



Photo (credit Gavin Duthrie): Rowan McCabe, a young man, stands in front of a mic reading Tyneside Papers at Connected Voice AGM.

Local poet, Rowan McCabe was commissioned by Connected Voice to write a poem for our AGM, which focused on the theme The Power of Local. After immersing himself in the history of our organisation he shared a powerful poem about the origins of Connected Voice, one of our founding members, Teresa Merz, and the importance of local community action.

If you would like to learn more about the history of Connected Voice, visit [www.connectedvoice.org.uk/about-us/our-story](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/about-us/our-story)

In the ragged towns of the 1920s,  
round smog-filled cobbles on the banks of the Tyne,  
where consumptive lungs were packed in slums,  
where jobs were scarce and leaders blind,  
there were people, like Teresa Merz,  
who set out to help those who needed it most  
with actions that spoke so much louder than words,  
which started as seeds and grew into oaks.

Cos no one is going to help us but us.  
'There is no alternative', the Chancellor drones,  
as they lock up the libraries, ramp up the cuts,  
and claim back expenses on their second homes.  
But back then, as the jobless wandered the streets,  
Teresa knew times were ripe for a change,  
we cannot depend on a distant elite,  
how can we be free with our neighbours in chains?

So they organised hostels and free legal aid,  
which the government later absorbed and enshrined,  
but these weren't gifts bestowed by the hands of the state,  
they were fought for by people who gave up their time,  
who knew the oppressed had been robbed of a voice,  
that poverty isn't a personal choice,  
who saw how the system was rigged from the start,  
it began on the day that we shut up our hearts.

The high and the low walk the same road together,  
there's a grit and a wit here that stitches our seams,  
in an age where the stakes are now higher than ever,  
come everyday heroes, we need you to dream ●

# Spotlight: Chopwell Regeneration CIO

**Jodie Barwick-Bell**  
Chair of Trustees  
**Sarah Cotton**  
Learning &  
Programmes Manager



Chopwell Regeneration Group (CRG) was founded by residents in May 2017 following decades of decline in the village. Our aim is to revitalise our village and improve the lives and life chances of people who live here.

## What does your organisation do?

Chopwell is a former mining village in rural west Gateshead with a population of c3,700 in 1,600 households. Investment here has been minimal since the closure of the mine in 1966, and around half the shops on Derwent Street (the main street) are boarded up. North Chopwell is one of the most deprived areas in England – in the lowest 4% of areas for employment and the lowest 6% for the impact low income has on children (IMD 2019). A high proportion of adults in Chopwell have no qualifications (27%) (Census 2011).

The deprivation levels in our rural community have led to significant crime, mental health, drug, alcohol and domestic violence issues. Many residents experience serious food poverty issues. However, Chopwell is also a wonderful community and residents have strong pride for Chopwell's history and a real sense belonging and community spirit.

The agreed aims of Chopwell Regeneration CIO are to support and sustain the regeneration of Chopwell through a combination of activities for residents prioritising:

- health and well-being
- educational opportunities
- inter-generational communication and relationship-building
- the local environment
- cultural growth

- employment and skills-learning opportunities
- family housing.

These improvements will be led by the ideas and needs of the community. In summary we are set up to help improve the lives of all residents in our community.

## Tell us about your key projects?

A local property developer contacted us in 2019 and asked if CRG would be interested in buying the old Lloyds bank building in the heart of the village. Gateshead Council agreed to buy it and lease it to us for 35 years – on condition that we raised the money to renovate it and bring it into use for the community.

**“The last year has been a whirlwind... We have become an employer, a landlord, a building owner and run a cafe and community market**

We managed to raise the money and work started in April 2021. We wouldn't let the pandemic stop us! The last year has been a whirlwind and a very transitional year as we have become an employer, a landlord, a building owner and run a café and community market.

What we do at The Bank

- Our café provides healthy meals at affordable Pay-As-You-Feel prices. The food is all surplus food from supermarkets so we



Photos starting top left: Staff from the Bank stand in front of the door waving, a group of children are using IT equipment inside the café, a busy café at a wine evening inside The Bank.



**“It’s made me feel more like myself again, I was quite low**

Resident

**“I’ve seen people blossom here, it’s been amazing to see people coming out of their shell**

Resident

are also fighting food waste and helping the environment.

- We have a community market stocked with groceries where residents can come and fill a shopping bag for £2 and a community fridge and freezer where fresh meals from the café are packaged into portions and can be taken home and heated up in the microwave.
- We offer opportunities for education, skills and training to help improve prosperity in Chopwell ie. 8-week work placements for people who are unemployed, in partnership with DWP. Opportunities for training and qualifications including employability skills, health and social care qualifications, mental health courses etc In April we launched an exciting STEM programme for children and young people, working with brilliant technologists and artists to offer workshops in coding, engineering and electronics.
- As part of our aim to improve social and cultural life in the village we have been running a programme of art classes. We have also started a board games club, and opportunities for people to volunteer in the café. We run events ie. Pop up markets with local charities and one-off restaurant nights to raise money.
- We are supporting mental health by running a monthly Memory

café for people living with dementia and their friends and family, and courses for adults and young people including Dealing with Setbacks and Confidence & Self Esteem.

In everything we do we aim to be a warm and welcoming safe place in the village where people can come together and thrive.

### How has Connected Voice supported you?

Connected Voice is our first port of call when we need advice. They have advised us on our Safeguarding Policy and DBS procedures. The Organisational Health Check was valuable and alerted us to a few points where we could make improvements.

### What do people say about your organisation?

We’ve had lots of positive feedback from residents. People are using the café and community market on a regular basis, not just to access and enjoy affordable healthy food but also to meet people and take part in activities which combat social isolation and improve wellbeing. Participants from recent workshops told us that the activities gave them something to look forward to, especially after feeling low and lonely following lockdown and 100% of participants said the activities had improved their wellbeing ●

# The Value of Keeping it Local

Vicki Harris  
Haref Coordinator



## How Haref Allies are championing health equality in the diverse ethnically minoritised communities of Newcastle and Gateshead

**Do you know who your local communities are, and is your project engaging with all communities? Would your organisation or service like to better understand the health needs of local ethnically minoritised communities?**

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted huge disparities in health across our diverse communities. Unfortunately, health inequalities have existed long before COVID-19 and Connected Voice Haref has been campaigning to change this for almost 20 years. Some ethnically minoritised communities experience significantly higher levels of ill health and premature death than the rest of the population and some communities are more likely to be in poverty, which is a significant factor in poorer health outcomes. We also have services that are not easy to access or designed to accommodate the needs and cultural differences within diverse communities.

One of the key things that makes Haref successful is our local focus on making a difference in the ethnically minoritised communities of Newcastle and Gateshead. Our Haref Network is made up of 80-90 representatives from those communities and they are the ones who highlight issues and drive our agenda. We then raise these issues and offer guidance to local health services through the Haref Allies.

For example, we worked in partnership with Healthworks, The Comfrey Project and the Haref Network to design a set of good practice guidelines for health services that want to

deliver health information sessions to diverse communities. These help services to ensure their sessions are accessible, culturally relevant and effective.

**“ A very useful document for staff to use**

Up until recently, we worked with our Haref Allies group for two years with no resourcing. We knew that if we wanted to make a real difference we needed more capacity and a clear focus in order to develop and achieve our aims. After securing funding for additional capacity within the Haref team, we were then able to turn our attention to the membership offer. We ran an event with our existing Haref Allies to get their feedback on what they would like to see as part of a new and improved offer, and we sent out a survey following this event. With 61 responses to the survey, we had plenty of information to feed into the design of the new membership offer.

**“ The Allies is an opportunity to make a positive change for people**

In early May, we launched a new paid-for membership offer for our Haref Allies to help strengthen our work with health services and improve their accessibility for ethnically minoritised communities in Newcastle and Gateshead ●

## Get involved - join the Haref Allies

### Haref Allies are organisations or services that:

- Are a health and wellbeing service **or**
- Have social value or addresses the wider social determinants of health **or**
- Are funders of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations **and**
- Deliver at least some of their services within Newcastle or Gateshead

### Through this new membership we will:

- Strengthen our current offer by providing more benefits for Haref Allies
- Engage better with health services and enhance our focus in light of the inequalities further highlighted by the pandemic
- Forge stronger links between the Haref Allies and the Haref Network to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes

### The new paid-for Haref Allies membership includes:

- Haref Allies events in September 2022 and April 2023
- The opportunity to support health information sessions with the Haref Network
- 2 complementary spaces on our updated Cultural Competency training
- 10% off all training packages offered by Connected Voice
- Information sharing through email updates
- 'I am a Haref Ally' badge for email

As part of the membership we ask all our Allies to complete our Cultural Competency training.

“ [The] Cultural Competency training was really helpful and the network provides an invaluable connection to knowing what is happening in communities

This training looks at barriers to accessing services, explores culture, local demographics, and gives guidance to help you provide more inclusive services through follow-up resources with additional opportunities to learn.

### Our aim for this membership and for all our Haref Allies are:

- Services will be provided with help and guidance on how to improve health and wellbeing amongst minoritised communities
- We will provide opportunities to work in collaboration with the Haref Network
- There will be support from other Ally members through sharing information and good practice
- We can provide tailored training to make individuals and organisations culturally competent when working with ethnically minoritised communities

“ Being an Ally means networking, learning from and supporting each other

If you are interested in being a Haref Ally and would like to sign up, you can find out more on our website at [www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/haref/haref-allies](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/haref/haref-allies)

Or email [nisa.shah@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:nisa.shah@connectedvoice.org.uk)

You can also find out more about the work of Haref and sign up to our monthly email bulletin at [www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/haref/](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/haref/) ●



Connected Voice  
Haref Ally

# Mapping Local Advocacy Services

**Melissa Girling**  
Information Officer



Connected Voice Advocacy was commissioned by Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear (CNTW) NHS Trust and Inclusion North to carry out a mapping exercise to create a better understanding of advocacy services across the North East of England and North Cumbria for the benefit of service users, patients and multi-agency working. This forms part of the National Advocacy Review by NHS England/Improvement.

The report based on this research has been published and gives a comprehensive picture of the current advocacy landscape across the region, as well as exploring wider themes in the sector around quality measurements, training, innovation, networking and funding sources.

All 17 statutory advocacy providers replied to our survey and their responses provide rich detail about the complex mix of statutory, non-statutory/community and NHS Complaints advocacy across the region. Whilst the research focuses on statutory advocacy, many of the organisations deliver a mixture of statutory and non-statutory services.

Providers range from small local to larger national organisations, with some delivering only advocacy services and some part of organisations delivering a range of other services. The report identifies some of the benefits of working together across the advocacy sector:

## 66 Share best practice and developments

N-Compass

How our mapping report will help to improve knowledge of local services across the North East and North Cumbria, build relationships and ultimately improve support for people across the region

## 66 Shared experience and learning, more seamless service delivery across the region, better experience for service users

Adapt North East

## 66 Build knowledge. Share experience. Build relationships. Drive improvements. Influence policy

People First

## 66 Improved knowledge, awareness of best practice, training, improved service delivery

Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind

Respondents also spoke of challenges: "Networks have become complicated due to competitive tendering and concerns about revealing commercially sensitive information to potential competitors. A number of networks have not survived e.g. North East Regional Advocacy Network. The demise of networking and a supportive environment across the sector can only be detrimental to the people we work with." Competitive tendering is a subject that Lisa Goodwin also discusses in this edition on page 15.

The report identifies trends including:

- Many providers are now using an integrated advocacy model, using multi-qualified

advocates to follow the patient journey into the community and stay with them for continuity across advocacy types. This brings more flexibility but can incur higher training costs and more planning for service managers.

- Given that there is so much good practice to share in the region, people talked about wanting to avoid re-inventing wheels, and wondered how this can be facilitated.
- An eagerness to improve inconsistencies around referral criteria and streamline referral pathways across geographical borders.

The report evidences great commitment across the sector to providing highly-skilled advocacy to ensure that all people across the region with a right to an advocate under legislation have their voices and wishes heard in decisions made about them ●

“We are grateful to Connected Voice for their undertaken work and research around the Advocacy provision across the regions, which we were able to commission via a project enabled by the NHSE/I National Advocacy Review. This will help strengthen understanding of Advocacy to support system-wide working

Agata Wiorowska (Programme Manager, Trust Innovation Group CNTW NHS Trust

## Celebrating our Award-winning Advocacy Service

We are delighted that Connected Voice Advocacy recently won the **'Outstanding Service' award** at the 2022 National Advocacy Awards! Thank you to those who nominated us: Gateshead Council for our safeguarding work to protect people from harm and abuse and Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner for our Hate Crime Advocacy.

“A recent Safeguarding Adults Board quality assurance event identified the strength of our partnership working and your well-deserved award helps to demonstrate the result of this work.” Steph Downey, Gateshead Council

It's been a busy few months for our Advocacy team. We were re-awarded the **Advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM)** from the National Development Team for Inclusion for a further three years. The QPM is the UK's only independent quality performance mark for organisations offering independent advocacy – an essential service for people who need support to express their needs and have increased choice and control in their lives.

The QPM was awarded after a rigorous assessment process. The assessor said:

“Throughout the assessment process from desktop to interview it has been apparent that

CVA (Connected Voice Advocacy) is a highly values led organisation; with a passionate, skilled and knowledgeable team, underpinned by strong leadership and robust systems and policies. ... CVA was consistently seen as responsive, dedicated and highly person centred.”

Jane Kingston, CVA Manager, said:

“[It] was a pleasure to read that the systems are effective, our service is recognised for the values it upholds, the satisfaction the team get from being advocates here and most importantly the feedback from people who use our services.”

[Find out more and read the full report](#) ●

Photo of Advocacy Awards glass trophy and QPM logo - a purple crown icon



# Families through Crisis - Harnessing the Power of Local

**This project provides vital support to families experiencing hardship who would otherwise not engage with services. It clearly demonstrates the power of combining local knowledge within the partnership, pooling resources and sharing expertise**

Families through Crisis is a partnership project with a big reach. Embedded in the West End of Newcastle the project provides support across the whole city. The partnership is led by the North East Law Centre which provides essential welfare and benefit advice. Connected Voice Advocacy provides the Independent Advocacy element of the partnership, which empowers people by supporting them to understand their rights and amplify their voices. Changing Lives in turn provides support through a worker who links families into appropriate services.

This project works so well because the three strands combine to provide a comprehensive wrap-around service which is embedded in the local community and flexible in meeting the complex needs of the families it supports. The way the project is operated and governed has also enabled the partners to better understand each other's work and strengths.

Anyone accessing the service is holistically assessed, then receives in-depth support from the highly-skilled workers from just one or all three of the partner services, depending on their needs. They benefit from the team's excellent understanding of local services and community resources.

Evaluation of the project confirmed that between 2016 and 2020 the partnership benefited an estimated 2086 adults and children. This was as a result of directly supporting 686 individuals in families, with a total number of children estimated at 1357, in addition to 43 adult dependents. This intensive support continued throughout the Covid pandemic and is ongoing today ●

**“The Families through Crisis project has been a truly rewarding and fulfilling partnership project. The partners have worked well together and have learnt a lot about each other's specialisms to enhance project delivery. This is a truly unique partnership between North East Law Centre, Changing Lives, and Connected Voices that has evolved into a holistic client-centred support service for families in Newcastle, we are really proud of the service and our achievements as a partnership.**

Cath Mitchell, North East Law Centre

**Connected  
Voice** Advocacy

 North East  
Law Centre

**CHANGING  
LIVES**

# Working in Partnership - the Value of Local Relationships

**Lisa Goodwin**  
Chief Executive



**For many years, organisations in our sector have complained about the way that contracts and commissioning processes make them compete with each other where they would prefer to work together. Even where organisations are open to partnerships and willing to work together – the financial reality of trying to share a contract sometimes doesn't make that possible.**

We have a few different partnerships with going on with our sister local infrastructure organisations, which have allowed us all to develop new services in our own patches, and reach a greater number of organisations. Without exception these are funded via grants, and mostly from the National Lottery Community Fund, which has a good track record on supporting effective partnerships. Managing to establish a partnership when a contract is in place is a different matter.

To give an example, we are a Newcastle-based organisation which holds the contract for statutory advocacy in Gateshead. One of our valued partner organisations, Your Voice Counts, is based in Gateshead and holds the contract for statutory advocacy services in Newcastle. Both Connected Voice and Your Voice Counts have a wider area of benefit than Newcastle or Gateshead, so there is nothing inherently wrong with this situation – but we both share the view that it is a shame we couldn't find a way to run the contracts together and make best use of the skills, expertise and local reach of both organisations. We recently talked about bidding for some new work together, but again for

financial viability (and short timescale!) reasons, we decided not to.

I believe strongly in Lord Haldane's principle that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the people they affect. I think in our modern service orientated world, this naturally extends to mean that services those people receive should be as close as possible to where the need is. For sustainable, effective delivery of services that really meet local need, local is best. But local costs more money. During the many years of austerity we have seen local authorities and health trusts centralise and consolidate services as they have faced funding challenges. And, happily, more recently we have seen some re-invest in locally based partnerships. In Newcastle, Children and Families Newcastle is a community network providing services for children young people and families via four different community hubs across the city. Each has a range of different services within the building, but is led by a VCSE partner. In Gateshead, the Council decided that having their services and staff based out in 'locality hubs' (which they began during the pandemic) is something they want to continue longer-term.

This renewed understanding of the value of local is beneficial for the VCSE sector – the vast majority of which is neighbourhood based. I would love to think that public sector commissioners will be able to take the next step and start breaking down contracts into lots that are more deliverable on a local level by small organisations, or to put the resource into larger contracts that allows funding for the time and resource that is needed to go into developing a good partnership. Given the cost of living crisis that we are all now facing, that seems very unlikely in the short term. But we'll continue to make the case for it, and to highlight those examples where brilliant local partnerships are supporting our communities ●

# Cost of Living Crisis: Supporting our Local Communities

**Giovanni Spatuzzi**  
Strategic Partnerships and  
Operations Manager



## What can we do to support one another in this challenging time and which local organisations offer advice?

**Along with the war in Ukraine, the media has been dominated by the cost of living crisis that the UK is facing now and in the foreseeable future.**

Inflation currently stands at around 9%, a 30 year high, and is set to rise even higher later this year. However, in reality the cost of many essential items, and in particular supermarket 'value' ranges has risen far more than this, as highlighted by poverty campaigners like Jack Munroe. At the same time, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that real household incomes will fall by 2.2% this year. This will have a devastating impact for many households.

### What can we do?

As well as the people and communities your organisation supports, it's likely that many of your own volunteers and staff are feeling worried about managing their money and paying the bills. At Connected Voice, we've opened discussion internally about what we can do. A 9% salary increase may not be possible but there could be other ways your organisation supports staff – a one off payment to cover winter fuel bills, access to an emergency loan, sharing tips and training about reducing bills or giving people more flexibility to either work from home or the office – these are just a few of the ideas we have begun to explore.

Connected Voice Support and Development team are preparing for an increase in enquiries from organisations, especially around advice and guidance on accessing funds, and information on which organisations to

sign post to in order to best support people who are struggling with day to day living. If your organisation is facing pressures due to increased demand for services and / or maintaining service delivery levels, please get in touch with the team. Email [connect@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:connect@connectedvoice.org.uk) or call 0191 2357021 to speak with one of our Support and Development Officers.

Energy costs are a major concern for everyone right now, particularly charities that need to heat large premises. It is important to check that you are paying the correct rate for your energy because charities are eligible for 15% reduction on VAT for fuel and power if they are for charitable and non-business activities. Local initiatives like [Going Green Together](#) are also a great way to swap energy-saving tips with other organisations. [Citizens Advice Gateshead](#) also offer free energy training for your staff and volunteers.

### Where to get advice and support

[Citizens Advice Gateshead](#) and [Citizens Advice Newcastle](#) offer free advice about benefits, energy, debt and money. [Turn2Us](#) is a national charity that helps people in financial hardship to gain access to benefits, grants and support services. They have an online benefits calculator and grants search tool.

[Information Now](#) has a comprehensive list of where to get local advice and support around a range of issues, where to get free and cheap food in Newcastle, as well as tips and links to national schemes and services ●

# The Power of Supporting a Local Charitable Company

We couldn't share this magazine on the Power of Local without shouting about the brilliant work of our team in Business Services. For many people, good finance and accountancy might not be the most exciting aspect of running a successful project or organisation but it is vitally important.

Our team of expert accountants in Business Services have been supporting voluntary and community action across Newcastle and Gateshead for almost three decades. In that time they have helped hundreds of organisations with payroll, Year End accounts, Independent Examinations and ongoing finance support.

Organisations choose Connected Voice Business Services because of their personal service and expert knowledge around charity finance. Working with colleagues in our Support and Development team, they can identify and fix the most complex issues relating to finance, governance, business strategy, project planning and funding. This is what sets the service apart from a generic Accountant.

**“ They deliver an excellent service and are in tune with the needs of the sector, flexible, approachable and professional**

Business Services aren't just for charities; the team supports a range of private local businesses too:

**“ I have used Connected Voice for 20 years and they have provided up to date, accurate payroll information to my accountants, PAYE, auto enrolment and of course the important bit, paid the**

**staff the correct amount on time, every time without fail. It's one headache I haven't had to worry about, its great value for money too.**

## Funding support for local voluntary and community organisations

When you choose the support of Connected Voice Business Services for your organisation, you directly fund future support to help other local voluntary and community organisations thrive.

100% of the profits generated by Business Services are gifted back to the Connected Voice charity and our Annual Report for the year September 2020-21 shows this amounted to an impressive £32,535.

## Free Quickbooks Training

Business Services is a certified Quickbooks ProAdvisor. If your organisation has an annual income of less than £500,000, our team can provide free training in Quickbooks. Get in touch if you would like to know more - email [cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk)

Quickbooks Certified  
ProAdvisor Advanced  
Online logo with a  
downward pointing  
green arrow



# Building Confidence and Capacity in Funding

**Jack Summerside**  
Support and Development  
Officer



**Jack talks with Newcastle Community Asset Trust about how they have changed their approach to be more successful with funding bids**

**In this edition we're taking a look at a successful and ongoing funding support relationship that has been developed between Connected Voice Support and Development staff and Newcastle Community Asset Trust. It's a really good example of collaborative working together over time, deepening our understanding of an organisation's funding needs and building their confidence and capacity in fundraising.**

Newcastle Community Asset Trust (NCAT) is a trio of community centres in the West of Newcastle with buildings in Fawdon, Cowgate and Blakelaw. Their mission is to support communities, empower local residents and their aspirations. The hubs were formerly Newcastle City Council owned and run, with NCAT being formed during the first wave of asset transfers of community centres to voluntary sector organisations to manage, run and develop them.

Glenn Pendleton, NCAT's CEO approached us in July 2021 for advice on funding sources for a couple of capital items, including replacing the heating boiler at Blakelaw..

We had to advise that stand-alone capital costs like these were hard to fund. Glenn says "It's great that Connected Voice took time to get a deeper understanding of what we do at NCAT. That's meant they're equipped to support us to make more persuasive funding bids, helping us to describe the 'why' and not just the 'what'.

By drawing out the social outcomes, different target groups, particular concerns such as mental health, we've been able to consider a much wider range of different potential funding streams than we would have."

Initially we had a couple of one hour meetings to help us really get under the skin of what NCAT offers, its impact, priorities and ambitions. We also got the essential background not only on NCAT's current funders, but on the funding landscape of some of the other key partner agencies that deliver services from NCAT's hubs. This kind of background is essential for us to be able to give useful advice on funding sources – and avoids us suggesting and investigating funders an organisation is already aware of.

Glenn adds "We feel much more confident in broadening our funding approaches, and seeing how the things we want to fund can fit with a range of different funder priorities. We're also much more confident in thinking about different ways to deliver the things we want to."

One example of this is collaborating with Newcastle University counselling students. "The University needed placement opportunities for students in the later years of their studies, and we wanted to be able to provide mental health support for local people. Connected Voice was able to help us with the design of some aspects of the service that would set us up for the future in being attractive to funders."

Glenn continues “We’ve taken a second look at funders where we’ve been unsuccessful previously – we wouldn’t have done that without Jack encouraging us to do that, or explaining how those funders now have different streams or priorities.”

Glenn met every 6 to 8 weeks with Connected Voice staff over the last few months and as a result has raised just over sixty thousand pounds. To put that in context though, that’s spread over four different bids of varying amounts and another seven bids worth up to seventy five thousand pounds have been unsuccessful in that period.

“One of the important things that we’ve taken on board is that we can’t pin all our hopes on every single funding bid. We’d have thought we were failing, but Connected Voice has helped us appreciate that we’ve had a considerably higher than average success rate in our bids over the last year. As well as recognising that, with a wider range of suggested funders to approach we’ve been able to streamline the process and make many more bids than we would previously have done. We’ve got greater clarity on our

priorities, an ongoing rolling programme of work on applications and a regular pipeline of suggested sources. It’s also so much less of a downer when a funder declines a bid, so it doesn’t cause a wobble in confidence in writing the next one”

We’ve thoroughly enjoyed working with Glenn and it’s been great to be able to develop an ongoing funding support relationship in this way. It can be challenging to help people find potential funding sources in a reactive or crisis driven way, so being able to forward plan in a timely fashion has been really productive.

You can find out more about NCAT, its three hubs and the range of activities and services they deliver themselves or in partnership with other organisations by visiting their website [www.newcastlecat.org.uk](http://www.newcastlecat.org.uk)

You can learn more about support available to organisations on the Support and Development pages of our website at [www.connectedvoice.org.uk/supportanddevelopment](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/supportanddevelopment) ●

Photo: A group of adults and children stand and sit in a garden behind the purple building of Betty’s Hut, a new garden building run by Projects 4 Change, having an informal chat. One girl is holding a guitar.



## Contact us

### Connected Voice

Support and  
Development

Expert support services that enable voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to set up, be sustainable and informed, achieve their objectives and come together.

[connect@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:connect@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7021

### Connected Voice

Business  
Services

Quality and cost-effective financial support services that meet the growing needs of charities, community organisations and social enterprises.

[cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7020

### Connected Voice

Advocacy

Free professional support to individuals to help them be aware of their rights and choices, make informed decisions, advocate for themselves and facilitate their voices being heard.

[advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7013

### Connected Voice

Haref

Working with communities and organisations throughout Newcastle and Gateshead to reduce health inequalities linked to ethnicity and culture.

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0191 235 7022

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