

Spotlight

Resilience

Featuring Age UK Gateshead and Newcastle Women's Aid

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About this magazine

The Connected Voice magazine is published four times a year by Connected Voice. 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.

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Issue 3: Resilience

When we started planning this edition, some months ago, we decided on the theme of resilience. Since then, the world has been turned upside down for all of us, and voluntary and community groups across Newcastle and Gateshead have stepped up in huge numbers to support those who need extra help to stay safe and well in the midst of a global pandemic. We have stuck with the theme because we are all so proud of the outstanding resilience our sector is showing right now; it is a privilege to be able to showcase a small amount of it here.

I have already heard from a number of people in positions of power - from local councillors and MPs to government ministers - that the ability of VCSE organisations to step in and support people in this pandemic has astounded them, and will not be forgotten. I hope we can help to make sure that this is the case.

Resilience is going to be more necessary than ever to ensure that we continue to have a sector as rich in diversity and as great in number at the end of this as we do today ●

Lisa Goodwin, Chief Executive

Resilience

Lisa Goodwin
Chief Executive



“ I hope that if there is some good that comes out of this pandemic, it is that people have renewed trust in and admiration for charities, and that people once again appreciate the value of local, neighbourhood organisations

Over the past two months I have witnessed so many examples of organisations who have put aside their usual work to do whatever is needed: youth groups changing to focus on emergency food parcel delivery; older people's organisations opening their services up to anyone who needs them, regardless of age or location; community facilities being transformed into distribution hubs to make sure those people who need food and provisions get them. I am not surprised by any of this; adaptability, resilience and sheer determination to do what is needed has always been a core strength of the voluntary and community sector. Each organisation initially arose from the desire of a small number of people to meet a need or effect a change; that ethos remains, and comes to the fore at times of crisis. I hope that if there is some good that comes out of this pandemic, it is that people have renewed trust in and admiration for charities, and that people once again appreciate the value of local, neighbourhood organisations.

Since the early stages of the pandemic we have been asking organisations for a lot of information about how they are faring. I know many of you now have survey fatigue, but doing this was essential for us to get an accurate picture of what the main challenges were, and how we could help. We have been making the case to funders and local authorities about the importance of core funding to ensure that organisations can get over the loss of income that has been a reality for so many. The irony is not lost on me that it is our most entrepreneurial organisations, those who have made great efforts to generate earned income and move away from relying on grants or reducing public sector contracts, who are most affected by the lockdown.

As an organisation we are now starting to shift some of our focus from support with the crisis response, to recovery, and we know from our research that the financial picture is bleak for a lot of organisations. We know that many charities have been using their reserves to make sure people are fed or supported in other essential ways. We are doing everything we can with national and regional partners to lobby for additional financial support for VCSE organisations, to persuade funders and public sector partners to focus on core funding and forget projects for a while, and to raise awareness of the amazing work going on in Newcastle and Gateshead. Local funders and our local public sector have been swift and generous in their response to date. But they are also feeling the pinch, so there will need to be an increase in support from national government if we are to get through this; at the very least this means opening up more of the current business support packages to charities.

I want to end with a note about equality. This crisis has exposed to an even greater extent all of the inequalities in society which VCSE organisations including ourselves exist to address. People from BAME communities, people living in poverty, and those with disabilities and underlying health conditions are all at a massive disadvantage in the fight against coronavirus. It has taken a large number of people dying to reinforce the point we have always made – that inequality is the underlying factor in all health, social and economic disadvantage. Thank you to every single organisation which is continuing to meet the immediate basic needs of people during this time, without you I cannot imagine how much worse this crisis would be ●

Our Values: We support action

Amy McKie
Marketing and
Communications Officer



Learn more: visit our website
www.connectedvoice.org.uk

In each edition of Connected Voice, we are sharing one of our values and how this relates to who we are as an organisation.

On the theme of 'resilience' and community response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it feels fitting to next look at how 'we support action'.

We support action.

We understand from our own experiences the challenges people face. We truly value people and we won't judge or dictate.

Leading independently and side-by-side with our communities and partners, we share our resources, skills and expertise to enable people to take meaningful action.

You only have to flip through a few pages of this magazine to see a truly inspiring response to a crisis from our local community. We are proud that we've been able to react quickly to a fast-moving situation in order to help mobilise the tremendous efforts of individuals, volunteers and organisations across Newcastle and Gateshead.

Like many organisations, we've had to change what we usually do in order to make a

difference. Partnerships that would typically take weeks to form have grown in a matter of days and projects that would usually receive months of planning have been hatched, designed and delivered in less than a week. We've seen creativity, resources and skills shared in ways that we never would have thought possible at the beginning of the year. Adapting quickly to these new ways of working will prove valuable long after the duration of this global pandemic.

At a time where feelings of sadness, frustration and anxiety can easily take control, the uplifting stories surrounding these positive actions bring hope and a sense of community spirit. The hard work of charities and community organisations across the nation has not gone unnoticed, and we're pleased to share these stories far and wide to help shine a spotlight on those who have made a genuine difference to people's lives.

Throughout our 90-year history, we have always supported meaningful action, offering our advice and expertise to help organisations achieve positive change.

These last few months have brought more challenges to overcome than ever before but we hope that as a result, the organisations that make up our vibrant voluntary and community sector feel supported and reassured that we're still here, helping in whatever way we can ●

Tackling Domestic Abuse

Siobhan Flynn
Support and Development
Officer



Times are strange. We have found ourselves adapting to life in lockdown, trying to adjust to the “new normal” which is very much centred around life at home. For some members of our society, home isn’t a safe space and the current measures in place mean that they, though safer from COVID-19, are more at risk in other ways.

Many domestic and sexual violence victims now find themselves trapped with the perpetrators of their abuse. Reports are showing a spike in

“Many domestic and sexual violence victims now find themselves trapped with the perpetrators of their abuse

abuse related internet searches and, findings from a SafeLives survey shows, just under a quarter of services have seen caseloads increase due to COVID-19. Lisa King, from Refuge, has attributed this not necessarily to an increase in abuse but individuals identifying themselves as being victims of abuse for the first time and thus reaching out for support in a way that they previously have not. However, this is a complex picture and other

What must we do to support vital domestic abuse services in these challenging times?

services are reporting a drop in referrals, likely due to victims no longer having time alone to be able to seek support. During the first three weeks of lockdown we saw a spike in domestic homicides with the rate of women and children killed by a man they live with being three times higher than the same time last year.

We have seen both national and local organisations adapt their services to support victims whilst following social distancing measures. Helpline services remain open for most with the same being true for email, online chat and text support from organisations already offering this. Some groups who may not have offered online or mobile support previously are adapting to include this. As meeting in person is no longer possible, a number of services have begun offering online counselling sessions. Refuge reported a 700% increase

“Refuge reported a 700% increase in helpline calls in a single day during lockdown

in helpline calls in a single day during lockdown. They have created ‘Coronavirus: Safety tips for survivors’ and are encouraging use of their online web form so victims can state a time that is safe to be contacted.

As victims of abuse will still be expected to shop or collect medication, domestic abuse charity, Hestia, are overseeing a safe space model at most of the UK's 2,400 Boots pharmacies. Hestia also have a mobile app where victims can access support and information; they have already seen a 47% increase in use of this app since lockdown began.

Women's Aid, who have written a spotlight for this month's magazine, have partnered with railway firms to deliver their 'rail to refuge' scheme. This provides free train travel and refuge accommodation for women fleeing abuse.

More locally, West End Women and Girls' Domestic Abuse Champions have created a video sharing information and positive messages, reminding victims of abuse that they 'deserve a happy and safe life'.

What is needed to support these vital services?

Right now it is vitally important to ensure that victims can access information, support and messaging that enables them to receive help when they can. This is made difficult as information shared publically will also be seen or heard by perpetrators. Despite this, it is still important that messages about how and where support can be

66 It's important to share messages about how and where to access support

accessed are shared wherever possible – including through public broadcasts, community groups and in public spaces. This is something we can all do.

Services need flexible and ongoing funding. Many organisations are

having to change where existing funding is going and access their reserves to meet urgent needs.

Ongoing funding will also be vital to help groups prepare the inevitable surge once lockdown is lifted and victims are more able to leave their homes and seek help. It is likely that these victims will have severe trauma caused by this increased period of abuse, requiring specialist support. Referrals for support for children who have experienced a parent's abuse and/or been abused themselves are also expected to increase.

Further research must be conducted to create a clearer picture of abuse. In the current circumstances, the numbers of referrals may not be a reliable indicator of the amount of abuse taking place. It is likely that those being abused are waiting until post-lockdown to access services. Along with this, there is currently a lack of research on the impact of COVID-19 on the abuse of older people, those with disabilities, refugees/migrants and survival sex workers.

COVID-19 must not be accepted as an excuse or explanation for why domestic/sexual abuse is occurring. Though COVID-19 may intensify triggers, abuse is a purposeful and intentional choice; what we are seeing now is a window into the levels of abuse victims live with all the time.

Support must continue. The services that groups like those noted offer for victims of abuse are always important. Now, with victims spending concentrated periods of time with perpetrators, they are needed more than ever ●

Spotlight: Newcastle Women's Aid

Elaine Langshaw
CEO

Elaine highlights the impact COVID-19 has had on the organisations' beneficiaries and how their services have had to adapt during the pandemic



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What does your organisation do?

We provide specialist support to women and girls affected by domestic abuse.

Services include:

Domestic Abuse Flexible Support (DAFS) this service offers one to one support and group-work which focuses on recovery and staying safe. Support includes: safety planning, advocacy, emotional and practical support.

Group work programmes including: The Freedom Programme and Freedom Forever. Our group programmes provide opportunities for women to recognise domestic abuse, understand its impacts and explore options so the process of recovery can begin.

- Women's Peer Support Group.
- Free phone, Domestic Abuse Helpline.
- Training and information sharing workshops.

How have your beneficiaries and the wider community been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Right now home is not likely to be a safe place for victims of domestic abuse. We are aware of the safety

concerns in relation to lockdown and self-isolation for women who are trapped at home with their abusive partners and isolated from the people and resources that could help them.

Calls to our Helpline have not yet increased but are likely to do so. We know there will be women who need our help but are unable to reach out or may think there is no support available. So we need to get the message out there that support is available.

We would like to highlight Coronavirus does not cause domestic abuse, the abuser is always responsible and in control of their actions.

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of domestic abuse related searches online and some people are recognising for the first time they are experiencing domestic abuse.

We know the numbers of people requesting support is rising and is likely to be phenomenal once lockdown restrictions are eased. We are currently communicating with key partner services in the city so we can prepare to meet demand.

National Women's Aid has launched 'The Lockdown' Campaign. The campaign aims to highlight increasing rates and current risks of domestic violence and abuse due to the pandemic.

“Home is not likely to be a safe place for victims of domestic abuse”



For more information visit: www.womensaid.org.uk.

How have you changed or adapted your services to better support your beneficiaries during the pandemic?

Our specialist staff team are now working remotely from home. We have adapted our service provision and although we are no longer able to provide face-to-face support we are continuing to provide a telephone advice and support service, which is vital.

We are also providing email support for those who cannot make telephone contact as it's not safe for them. We would normally try to minimise email contact for safety reasons, as it could be risky for women if her perpetrator were to gain access to her emails and

“For some people the face-to-face sessions are a lifeline

we can never be sure who we are talking to. But we now know, more women are using online support services.

National Women's Aid offer an online service which includes an instant-messaging service, email support and The Survivors Handbook which has practical support and information for women experiencing domestic abuse. For more information visit www.womensaid.org.uk



We continue to provide emotional support to our current clients and have had contact from previous clients too. We offer a flexible service, so support is not time limited and women can dip in and out of service according to their levels of need. So it's of no surprise some women have resumed contact during this period of crisis. We aim to provide a very personal service to our clients and are continuing to do this despite the pandemic. Safety is always at the forefront of our work; even more so at this time when women are forced to stay at home, their support networks are reduced and they are isolated more than ever.

We are also using our Facebook, to share information on important issues which women and professionals are requesting or sharing with us. As a result, we are now experiencing an increase in the number of women contacting us directly via Facebook messaging service for support.

We would like to reassure people that services are still running and although Public Health needs people to stay home and save lives, we recognise that this is not ideal for those at risk of violence and abuse. If you are at risk you can breach lockdown rules to get the help and support that you need ●

Mapping the crisis response

Giovanni Spatuzzi
Strategic Partnerships and
Operations Manager



How have local charities responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what happens next?

VCSE organisations are at the forefront in responding to the societal impact of COVID-19. In this time of crisis, many organisations have made unprecedented changes by adapting their services and developing new services to meet people's needs.

Organisations have acted quickly to refocus efforts and activities. They have altered their work to follow social distancing measures; dealt with a reduced workforce; inducted new volunteers; moved services online; and work from home in line with guidance from the Government, Charity Commission and National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

Through a new Make Place website, created in partnership with Newcastle University and Newcastle City Council, we have been collecting information and mapping services that your organisations are delivering across Newcastle and Gateshead during the pandemic. Across the voluntary and community sector, organisations have stepped up to make sure the most vulnerable

people in our communities haven't been forgotten. The following paragraphs give an overview of a very small number of the many organisations who have pro-actively adapted and expanded their work to best support people and communities.

As showcased in our spotlight article, Age UK Gateshead altered and expanded their services in Gateshead and Newcastle. With the help of a thousand plus volunteers they are supporting people of all ages with routine shopping, collecting and delivering prescriptions, and befriending and reassurance services. Newcastle Women's Aid adapted their services for women experiencing domestic violence and abuse through the use of email and phone.

The Trussell Trust Food Banks across Newcastle and Gateshead adapted and expanded their service to supply pre packed food parcels for delivery to people's homes. Project Bind and Magic Hat reconfigured and scaled up their services to collect and distribute food. And Food Nation are now preparing hot meals for delivery. All these organisations and many more are responding to a sharp rise in the number of people needing emergency food and cooked meals.

Citizens Advice Newcastle and Citizens Advice Gateshead adapted their services; providing

“Organisations have stepped up to make sure the most vulnerable people in our communities haven't been forgotten

advice to people on issues such as rent, benefits, mortgages and employment through email, phone and web-chat. Both organisations have experienced a sharp rise in enquiries about benefits and employment.

66 Buildings are being re-purposed to meet current needs

Buildings are being re-purposed to meet current needs. In Newcastle, Healthworks have re-purposed one of their sites to be used as a designated treatment clinic for those who need COVID 19 treatment but don't require hospital admission. In Gateshead 10 VCS organisations have allocation space to be used as distribution hubs for the Council's emergency food scheme.

More organisations are utilising digital to reach their users. Chilli Studios are offering a weekly programme of live and recorded online art and cultural workshops, discussions and demos. Mindful Therapies are offering meditation and mindfulness sessions through Facebook and Instagram. ReCoCo have quickly moved most of their sessions online.

We could write a whole magazine on how VCS organisations have responded to this crisis – the above is just a brief snapshot of some of the great work that is happening.

What happens next?

Many funders have responded positively and proactively during this crisis, offering empathy and flexibility for organisations they support. This has given grant and contract holders more confidence in the short term. However, no matter how quickly the pandemic is under control, it is likely to have long lasting effects on society, and the activities that many organisations will undertake to meet their missions. Many organisations are rightly focusing on

their immediate response. But as this crisis continues resulting in a major recession and an era of disruption, many organisations will need to refocus how they deliver their mission over the medium term.

Involving the people who use your services is at the core of refocusing what your organisation does. In times of significant change, users can help raise issues and support organisations respond to them. As highlighted in this magazine, there is already emerging evidence that Covid-19 is disproportionately affecting women, disabled people and BAME communities.

This crisis is overwhelmingly negative, but there are positive things organisations are learning daily that can help shape what they do in the medium-term. The Three Horizons model for transitions can help you consider the opportunities emerging from new ways of working:

- **What is being born and how can we help it arrive well?**
Which areas of our new way of working do we want to keep? Could more virtual working be a good thing in some cases - for the climate and to save time?
- **What is ending and how can we help it to leave well?**
What forms of delivery are less relevant now and how can we phase them out with minimum negative impact?
- **What is being disruptive and how can we harness its potential?** Covid-19 has disrupted some organisations silo working and forced them to successfully work in partnership and share resources to meet people's needs. Can we take this opportunity to work more collaboratively in the future?

By considering these questions now, organisations can make a successful transition more likely. And ultimately offer a better chance of continuing to deliver impact for the people and communities they serve after the crisis ●

Charity Business Services

Michelle Wright
Charity Business Services
Assistant Manager



Charity finance crisis support and considerations for financial forward planning

COVID-19 hasn't just impacted on people's health. The financial repercussions have been drastic, particularly for the charity sector, which has not received the same level of support from government as business.

As a charity finance specialist, we want to do as much as we can to support organisations through this difficult time.

When our office closed, we adapted swiftly to continue our services and our usual face-to-face support via email, phone and video conferencing. Government announcements for new schemes started rolling in almost daily and our team quickly familiarised themselves with complex and often semi-completed changes in legislation so we could advise our clients on their options.

We ramped up our support at no extra cost to clients and began sending regular email updates as the changes in government schemes unfolded. At the same time, we shared resources on our website so that any organisation could access them.

We also enabled new clients to use our payroll services free of charge for three months with no obligation to a contract.

Many organisations that were hesitant about making the switch to online accounts systems have been forced to adapt quickly but we've been there to guide them at every step.

During this time of uncertainty, it is imperative to plan ahead and forecast. Our recommendations are:

- Go digital. There are many benefits to using a system that can be accessed by key personnel from a web browser rather than a manual spreadsheet. You can easily produce and share reports to summarise financial positions against a budget. When it comes to the year-end accounts examination, invoices and receipts can be attached to the transactions, which means an accountant can easily access copies of the supporting document, removing the need for paperwork.
- Have a budget in place ahead of the year-end so this can be revised if something unforeseen happens and you need projections of how the organisation needs to adapt.
- Have cash flow projections ready to show how long cash will actually last during this time of either little or no work. We can help you put these in place.

As the dust from this storm begins to settle, we want to reassure local organisations that we are continuing to do everything we can to support them because we know the financial implications of COVID-19 are likely to continue long after the spread of the virus.

If your organisation is in need of financial advice and support, please get in touch.

Call 0191 232 7445 or email

cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk ●

Supporting BAME communities through a health crisis

Vicki Harris
Haref Coordinator



Haref's work around health inequalities has never been more vital for our local Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities

The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected all of us. Though some people have been affected more than others, and for some communities, there has been a disproportionate impact on the health and lives of individuals. Data has shown that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities are both contracting and dying of COVID-19 at much higher rates than the rest of the population.

In response to this, we teamed up with Riverside Community Health Project, Northumbria Police and Newcastle City Council to look at how we could better support our local BAME communities. Speaking with members of different communities, we identified a common trend. They all needed clear and simple information supported by trusted and known local organisations, to help them understand what information was correct and relevant.

We took the key messages from government guidelines for social distancing and staying safe during the pandemic, and turned them into a one-page document that would resonate with different communities. We then worked with recognised members of those communities to develop short videos. The videos reinforced the health messages in different community languages and were shared through social media. The written messages were translated into different languages that could then be shared online or printed out.

The COVID-19 health messages and videos were also shared alongside our Haref Ramadan prayer calendars. We produce some 4,000 'safe fasting' Ramadan calendars each year for our local Muslim communities but this year they were all distributed digitally. The mosques emailed the calendars out to people and they were shared many times on social media, helping to bring these important messages around fasting and COVID-19 to the local community.

Following success in Newcastle, we were approached by Gateshead Council to help replicate this work with communities in Gateshead. We worked with local organisation GVEMSG/GemArts staff and volunteers to produce videos in different community languages to support communities in Gateshead.

By working with communities and listening to their concerns, we have been able to work out how best to respond to a grassroots need. It's really important to do this in partnership with trusted local organisations if you want to engage with people and share messages. It helps to maintain community cohesion and confidence in an unprecedented time.

There are challenging times ahead for all of us. Haref will continue to fight for health equality, working with local organisations to respond quickly to issues arising in our communities, look at how we can build resilience and develop plans around recovery from the current and long term effects of the pandemic ●

Subscribe to the monthly Haref email bulletin to stay up to date with our work

Spotlight: Age UK Gateshead

Ian Wolstenholme
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The Box

"Last Sunday a plain cardboard box arrived on the step at my front door mid-morning I'd say, delivered by my neighbours via Age UK Gateshead. As I opened the box to see what was inside I thought for moment just stop, and think about that box, filled with care and kindness all the way to the top.

To the team making that all important carton my list of thanks is only just starting, to the people and companies for every donation, for sharing your care and concern all across our great nation. Thanks all of the folk for packing those precious gifts in, for every packet, for every tin. To the people delivering that box to many a door I can only say thanks just wish it was more, your care and your kindness just the bonus that made my heart soar.

As we all look forward to that much brighter day, a really huge thanks goes out for all of the team at Age UK."

Supporting Gateshead communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

What does your organisation do?

As a charity we have always been part of our community a voice for the unheard and caring support with a listening ear for those who need it but we also know loving later life goes beyond crisis and into social interaction, exercise, culture, art and groups of common interest "Laughter truly is the best medicine".

Pre COVID-19 the charity provided 6 Day Centres, 6 days a week Dementia Service, Stroke rehab service, Living with and beyond cancer service, Mental health support, Bereavement support, 38 Social groups of common interest, Befriending, I.T Skills, 39 exercise classes ranging from chair based exercise to Tia Chi and Salsa. Income Maximisation through benefits advice & claims, Advocacy, Housing advice Housing Aids and adaptations, Palliative care.

As I write this I realise this is nothing more than a list, it doesn't outline the laughter the tears the progress we the Age UK family make together. I use the term family because that's what we are and we change lives together.

How have your beneficiaries and the wider community been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Our client database has over 10,397 people on it 3,278 of which are currently engaging with the organisation. The demographic

we serve have all disproportionately been hit by the pandemic from media information, government guidance to the breakdown in death rates along age ranges. This mix has created a valid worry and fear for life, preventing normal routines from taking place. The result of this turning upside of society has been fear regarding access to food/ medication/ money and enforced isolation. Older people are having to shield from the very communities and structures that provided vibrancy, purpose and meaning to their lives. Add to this limited family contact and people genuinely are in a state of panic or resigned acceptance.

How have you changed or adapted your services to better support your beneficiaries during the pandemic?

While many charities have been forced to temporarily or permanently close, we are lucky to have had the skills and resources to support our community through this crisis. For us, stepping back was not an option.

Age UK Gateshead restructured in 5 days, ceased all prior services in line with government guidance and created a structure that delivers shopping, collects prescriptions, pension collections, respite care, welfare calls, befriending, Hot Meals, retaining those services that looked after the most vulnerable such as those with cancer, bereavement and mental health challenges.



Photos courtesy of Age UK Gateshead

Above: Volunteers prepare hot meals to be delivered to the community



In the first week we answered 5,321 calls, became a seven days a week service, the main referral point for the council for shopping, delivered over 30 bags of shopping a day, collected over 200 prescriptions, 140 hot meals,

sides of the Tyne and taking our volunteer levels from 147 to 1482. This collaboration, being as wide as it is, shows community is bigger than one person and is not about imposing systems on individuals. It's about people and relationships; this is community in action!

“ In the first week we answered 5,321 calls, collected 200 prescriptions and prepared 140 hot meals

made 925 welfare calls and provided over 70 hours of respite care. Big numbers for a small charity!

Age UK Gateshead, as a charity, is a doing rather than a talking organisation, and in partnership with its vast array of new colleagues, we are making a difference, listening to people and meeting needs. We are not imposing behaviours but building on strengths. The culture of the organisation has always been about contact and interaction, which is way beyond delivering a food parcel, shopping or a prescription. It's about listening and learning, and building a full picture of each other in order to provide meaningful support. Admittedly this approach has been a steep learning curve for some partners but together we pull in the same direction helping each other along our current journey.

“Much more than an Easter egg you thought about me – Thank You”

“Thank You for making me laugh when I thought I couldn't. I look forward to your phone call every day, just don't ring when Bargain hunt's on!”

“I sat on the floor of the communal corridors for over hour whilst he sat in his doorway chatting about life, we laughed we cried and laughed some more but most of all I left him knowing we care he is not alone. This is what Age UK Gateshead do we make a difference with the smallest of gestures making the biggest impact.”

As demand grew we formed collaborations working initially with Gateshead Council, Citizens Advice Gateshead, Ebert's House, FACT, Connected Voice, St Chads and Teams & Bensham, Deans Taxis, Morrisons, Mecca Bingo, Aldi, Costa Coffee, Sky TV, e-on, British Gas, NHS Business, SAGE Accounting, Staiths Café and Collective Impact Agency. Across the river in Newcastle we formed partnerships with Search, local councillors and community groups. The biggest addition to the Age UK Gateshead family was the collaborative effort from over 20 Mutual Aid groups spanning both

Age UK Gateshead has retained its flexibility and its open door approach to collaboration. It is proud to find itself at the centre of community and service transformation, meeting needs and building a positive future. As we say in Age UK Gateshead “it's simply about people” ●

Helping people to be heard in a crisis

Jane Kingston
Advocacy Manager



Jane, our new Advocacy Manager, explains how the Advocacy team have been working hard to ensure people's rights are not forgotten and affected during the COVID-19 crisis

As the UK fell into 'lockdown' and a string of hastily agreed guidance on social distancing was applied, Advocates have been working harder than ever to ensure people's rights are upheld. Here's what we've been doing to make sure people are treated fairly and lawfully during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adapting our services

First came the practical challenges of how we at Connected Voice Advocacy transition our services so we can still provide essential support without putting anyone at risk or breaching the guidance on social distancing. We moved the whole team out of the office to their homes and set up a number of internal systems for remote working. Since March, we have been offering our Advocacy services using alternatives like phone calls, WhatsApp and video meetings.

Many of our clients have responded well to the changes but for some people it's not an option, either because they don't have the right technology or they don't feel comfortable using it. This is where our Advocates have been thinking creatively about how to conduct face-to-face meetings in a safe way. For example, one Advocate was able to meet with their client in the grounds of a hospital so they

Why Advocacy is more important than ever before

could hold a private meeting outside whilst maintaining social distancing.

Developing national partnerships and campaigns

We've been involved in a national partnership of advocacy organisations that have come together to campaign on behalf of vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortnightly meetings have proved incredibly valuable for sharing good practice and issues arising in an unprecedented and rapidly evolving situation.

The partnership of advocacy leaders developed strategic messages around what good advocacy practice looks like during the pandemic and thought about how we can encourage other partner organisations and referring organisations to engage with advocacy, reminding them that we are still here and very much needed. Part of this task involved drafting a letter to care homes and hospitals, which we shared in the partnership so other advocacy organisations could adapt it to suit their needs.

“As Advocates, it's our priority to make sure people's rights are not being unlawfully affected

It's been a challenge to keep up-to-date with evolving government guidance, legislation and the new Coronavirus Act 2020. As Advocates, it's our priority to make sure people's rights are not being unlawfully affected so Kate Mercer, leading advocacy training provider, arranged for a Barrister who is a specialist in advocacy to deliver a webinar. Over 500 Advocates attended the live

66 After seeking legal advice, we were able to lobby the government and other services around certain issues

session, alongside our own team in Connected Voice Advocacy.

After seeking legal advice, we were able to write appropriate guidance and lobby the government and other services around certain issues. We produced a useful 'myth busting' document that addresses common misconceptions and reminds people of their legal duties under the Care Act and Mental Capacity Act.

One example myth is that the Care Act no longer applies and local authorities don't have to assess, plan for or meet people's needs. In fact, whilst the Coronavirus Act 2020 does permit certain 'easements' to the Care Act, these changes must only be applied where absolutely necessary and must be rolled out across an entire local authority following a strict approval procedure. Where we have encountered instances of services or practitioners informally adopting 'easements', we've been able to correct them and ensure people's needs are met.

Another example myth is the shocking belief that blanket Do Not Attempt CPR (DNACPR) notices are permitted due to the national emergency. Some GPs have been applying DNACPR notices to

people with disabilities and older people without discussion. This has included blanket orders being applied to people simply 'because they live in a care home' or 'because the person has dementia and co-morbidities'. As Advocates, it's vital that we continue to make sure individuals are fully involved in such serious decisions and that they do not breach human rights.

What difference have we made to people's lives?

We have touched on a few examples where our Advocates have been able to challenge decisions and ensure services continue to act lawfully. Another important area has been around the interpretation of the guidance on social distancing and self-isolation.

We have seen cases where over-restrictive applications of 'lockdown' rules have affected clients' wellbeing and caused mental distress. One advocate supported a woman with a learning disability and autism to challenge a blanket ban, which prevented all residents from leaving the care home.

In another case, an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA) was able to support a patient to raise concerns that the care they were receiving was falling below standards and could be breaching their human rights. The patient had tested positive for COVID-19 and because the staff at the hospital didn't have PPE, their response was to isolate the person in their room with no toilet and only a bed pan. The IMHA helped the patient get access to a separate bathroom for their own personal use, that would be disinfected daily.

We will continue to ensure that our service users' rights are upheld, and their wishes, beliefs and views are considered, throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic ●

Find out more and refer
Please visit www.connectedvoice.org.uk or
call 0191 235 7013
email advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk

Funding and forward-planning after COVID-19

Jack Summerside
Support and Development
Officer



What are the next steps around funding as we ease out of lockdown and plan for the future?

Feedback from our case-work, funding events and Skills-Building Sessions tells us that you value opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of a broader range of funders.

Visit the Funding pages on our website for regular updates on funding opportunities

www.connectedvoice.org.uk/funding-opportunities

So what do we do next? At the time of writing, we're still in lockdown, and its most likely by the time you're reading this, there's been a partial relaxation.

You'll see elsewhere in this edition some of the amazing things that voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations across our region have done to support people and communities during the last few weeks. Showing the best qualities that characterise our sector: Imagination, agility, flexibility and going the extra mile to simply get things done.

But it's left many organisations in a fragile state. Our recent research, undertaken in partnership with other Local Infrastructure Organisations, looked at the effects of COVID-19 on local charities, community and social enterprise organisations. Almost 50% of survey respondents in Newcastle and Gateshead told us they have less than 6 months core running costs in their reserves, with half of these holding less than 3 months. 9% of respondents said it is likely or very likely that they will have to close in the next year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. 23% said closure is neither likely nor unlikely, perhaps reflecting a feeling of uncertainty around the future.

Organisations have had to suspend many of the activities that are central to the project-based activity that the majority of grant funding has been focused on in recent years. Whilst many funders have relaxed restrictions on the activity you can do with project funding, that still leaves many of us emerging from lockdown thinking "What next?" or even, "How do we keep afloat for another quarter?"

But it needn't be all doom and gloom. Although it may not seem like it, now is the right time to step back from the massive interruption and reconfiguration of what we do, and how we do it. It's a time to reflect on our core purpose: "What do we want to change for the better, and for whom?" In particular, many of us have had a whole new set of people coming to us for support that weren't on our radar before.

This may be a challenge but we have already seen more people coming into social action, volunteering and participating in their community than most of us have witnessed in our lifetimes. There's an opportunity to harness that and bring that fresh energy and perspective into the running of many of our organisations. And this requires some hard thinking and stepping back from the day-to-day to plan strategically.

One of the huge changes that may well stay with us is the shift to delivering more services digitally. This has moved forward the numerous challenges and opportunities we reflected on in

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our recent edition on the theme of digital. Something that recent weeks have taught us is that we can adapt, and quickly if we need to.

What are the next steps?

- Think hard about the people around you who can add value to the running of your organisation. Don't be shy or possessive; invite them in
- Have a strategic approach about what your organisation is for, and who it is for
- Set your priorities, for what you want to do, and build a funding strategy around those priorities
- Build your fundraising skills and capacity, and set aside proper time for fundraising
- Learn how to make a clear and compelling case for funding
- And most of all: Use the support available from Connected Voice, funders and the skills and knowledge of the communities you're based in

Connected Voice Support and Development has been keeping a close eye on the response of

national and regional funders and we've been regularly updating our website funding pages with a digest of news and announcements of new and changing funder priorities. We'll soon be launching our totally new website which will be even easier to navigate and connect you with funding sources and the funding events and services we can offer to existing, new and just-starting-out organisations across Newcastle, Gateshead and the wider region.

We've run some of our funding-related Skills-Building Sessions remotely, and spoken directly with a wide range of organisations with funding and strategy guidance. We're also going full steam ahead with our Connected Voice Newcastle and Gateshead Funding Fair 2020 on the 17 June, in a totally re-worked virtual form. We've also been working closely with our colleagues in neighbouring Local Infrastructure Organisations that serve Northumberland, North and South Tyneside and the wider region.

We are here to help. Get in touch ●

For more information about upcoming Skills Building sessions visit

www.connectedvoice.org.uk/our-services/training-and-events

Contact our Support and Development team:
Call 0191 232 7445 (opt 1)
or email
sdteam@connectedvoice.org.uk

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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.

sdteam@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 232 7445 (opt1)

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
0191 235 7013

Connected Voice

Charity 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
0191 232 7445 (opt3)

Connected Voice

Haref

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

haref@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 232 7445 (opt1)

0191 232 7445

connect@connectedvoice.org.uk

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