

## Ten weeks in: how it feels as the VCSE health system lead

Hello my name is... Sam Keighley. In January I was privileged to take on the role of Chief Executive of the [VCS Alliance](#) and the VCSE Health System Lead for the [Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership](#).

In my role as VCSE health system lead, I've committed to doing something like this every couple of months. Now that I've made it to the end of my tenth week, it feels like the ideal time to reflect on what's been happening, what I've been learning and what's coming up next.

### So, what's my role and how can I help you...

In my VCSE system lead role my focus will be to further develop the connections and collaboration across our VCSE sector and between our sector and our wider health and care partners. We all have a shared ambition to 'Act as One' to help people stay 'happy, healthy at home', and we're all committed to getting behind the efforts to tackle health and wider inequalities.

When writing this blog I've been asked to try to keep to a word limit, so you'll have to forgive me for providing a very brief overview of my role here;

- I'll work with Kerrie-Lee Barr and Vicki Beere to lead and further develop the VCS Alliance.
- As part of the Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership Leadership Executive (PLE), I'll provide leadership and an equal voice for the VCSE. This will be achieved through working closely with other VCSE leaders, and infrastructure organisations to ensure a strong, impactful, and sustainable sector.
- Provide senior VCSE sector leadership for our place-based partnership, and into the wider [West Yorkshire Integrated Care System](#). Specific groups where participation is expected include the [Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership Board](#), Partnership Leadership Executive, Partnership Leadership Team and the boards for [our five place-based priorities](#).
- Support the development of VCSE service delivery arrangements into the health and care partnership. For example, bid writing to external or ICS funds, and coordination of VCSE consortia delivering on health and care projects.
- Work with other VCSE leaders and infrastructure organisations to ensure that a wide range of perspectives from VCSE organisations are listened to and understood across our place-based partnership, and diverse feedback loops are in place to ensure the VCSE sector is well informed about the work of our place-based partnership.
- Represent the VCSE in discussions with the statutory sector in planning and commissioning processes.
- Feedback from VCSE sector organisations into wider decision-making groups such as the Wellbeing Board.

As your VCSE representative on these decision-making groups it's important that I provide a balanced voice for our sector. To help me get this right I'll provide

feedback on progress through a formal report on at least an annual basis. In addition, I'm committing to a 360 degree feedback from VCSE organisations as well as our broader system partners within Bradford District and Craven.

I recognise that the role of VCSE health system lead comes with a strong sense of responsibility and accountability to you all. I also recognise that I must also provide management and leadership support to the VCS Alliance's Chief Operating Officer, Kerrie-lee Barr, who has responsibility for all contracts and staffing matters.

### **We are all leaders**

My role system role provides additional capacity within our VCSE leadership. It is by no means the only leadership position; we all have a role to play. I recognise and draw strength from lots of VCSE colleagues already doing excellent work influencing and supporting our public sector colleagues around health and care and more broadly.

Personally, in this role, I want to be as open and transparent as possible to as wide a range of VCSE organisations and trusted as such by the sector and health and care colleagues. So, if you have suggestions for how I can do this better, please let me know.

### **The first 10 weeks**

As anyone who is new to a role, it doesn't matter what the role is and how well you think you know the people and networks around you, it is essential to get to know and build relationships. This is what I've been doing with my new colleagues at the VCS Alliance, staff and board directors. I've been working with them to decide what's the next step for the Alliance in securing further funding and investment that enables VCSE colleagues to deliver high quality services in Bradford District and Craven, working collaboratively, that represents best value for money for stakeholders. Thank you all for making me feel welcome and I promise I'll try and get into the office on more Wednesdays going forward, even if it is just to share lunch!

As many of you will be doing, I've been working out the new health and care structures and finding my place in them; including the Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership which is a committee of the [NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board](#).

I find it reassuring that the ICB's focus is on preventing ill health as much as possible, creating opportunities that help people stay healthy, well, tackling inequalities across our communities and prioritising prevention and early intervention, to foster healthy lifestyles, self-care and nurturing active communities so that people are happier, healthier and more independent.

I'm also involved in the Partnership Leadership Executive (the doing / bringing to life of the ICB's priorities at place); the [Wellbeing Board](#); the Wellbeing Executive and co-chairing the Community Partnership Steering Group with Duncan Cooper from the [Reducing Inequalities Alliance](#).

I've been getting to know and build relationships with people across the system.

I've been thinking about the best feedback loops we can create across the VCSE sector so that I, and others, can report back about what we are doing, and gather insight and intelligence from across the sector to use in our influencing and advocacy roles. There are already some good mechanisms run through the Here4BDCC partnership like the Leaders Network and WhatsApp group (please join it if you haven't already. There is lots of information shared on the group and its open to anyone working in our sector) And the Health and Wellbeing Network. And we need to get even better at this, including further broadening the range of VCSE organisations working together for the common good of our communities.

Some of the things I wanted to cover is the work that has already happened or is happening within our sector.

In challenging circumstance CABAD has pulled together a strong infrastructure partnership, the sector is reporting that this feels more inclusive than before. Community First Yorkshire's priority is to ensure that Craven's VCSE voices connect with the wider Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership, particularly in terms of tackling access to services in rural communities, REN is doing a great job strengthening connections and building capacity with a range of communities experiencing the worst inequalities and often least served or heard. Participate Projects is supporting people from all communities to develop social enterprises that support our communities, Cnet is delivering small grants and the Impact Hub has plans to help bring even more external investment into our sector. Most of these organisations are also involved in running and promoting leadership and mentoring opportunities. I look forward to sharing similar examples from across our sector in my next blog.

### **Friends reunited**

I've been away from the Bradford District for four and a half years. The world has revolved a few times in that period and there have been lots of changes both in how the health and care system is organised and the roles that people are playing. It's been great to see some of the talented people in our system progressing in their careers. So, I know I have a lot to learn. Please don't assume I know everything!

I've been re-acquainting myself with the patch including the fabulous and vibrant VCSE sector. Among the places I've visited and people I've met are Shamim at Roshni Ghar in Keighley, a couple of the Wellbeing Hubs - Sam and Kay at Sutton Community Centre, Raj at Bridge's Daisy Hill Farm hub, Mark at Manningham Mills Community Association, Sonja at HALE, and snow stopped me visiting Emma and team at SELFA in Skipton recently, so we had to retreat to a zoom chat. I promise to visit in person as soon as I can. I'm keen to build visits to VCSE organisations into every month so, if you'd like me to visit your organisation, please let me know. I want to visit a diverse range of organisations, right across Bradford District and Craven and I won't let the infamous Yorkshire weather get in the way!

### **What I've been learning**

We are all much busier because of increasing demand and in need of more resources than ever before. And that's not only in our sector. We know from the press that the NHS is also facing unprecedented pressure and reducing resource.

Connectivity and collaboration across the system, including the VCSE, is where the real magic and impact happens. Some of you will know I'm a big fan of John Paul Lederach who is an internationally renowned peace builder. He also talks about that, for things to work really well, you need 'bottom up' 'top down' and 'middle out' connectivity. Check out his [The Moral Imagination](#) if you want to know more.

Our Health and Care system needs our sector to collaborate. Historically, this has sometimes caused us challenges, both across the VCSE sector and with our statutory partners.

Collaboration can be difficult for all of us, particularly when trusted relationships aren't there or have been lost. And sometimes building relationships are difficult when we perceive that we are powerless and think other people hold the power and/or are not sharing the power equitably. I've seen this in our sector, between our sector and health and care colleagues and within the health and care system. I had a really stimulating conversation about this recently and feel that this could be critical in building further collaboration. I'm keen to explore it more, with anyone who is interested, from any part of the system.

Building relationships is key to all our work, and that this takes time, too often time we don't feel we have. However busy we are, we must still make time to have coffee with people, spend time with and listen to each other, and introduce each other to new people who we think have common interest. This is both across our own sector and with our health and care colleagues. I'm thinking of ways we can help support this to happen more whilst taking minimum time away from day-to-day pressures.

### **Coming up**

Writing a blog and keeping it succinct sure is a challenge. So my next blog will include all the things I've had to edit out so that I can keep you, my reader, engaged. However what I can say will be coming up is more visits to VCSE organisations, working with colleagues at the VCS Alliance to secure more resource and build further collaboration, being a strong and vocal advocate for the VCSE while also reflecting on the challenges facing our partners from other sectors and agencies and finally I'll be reflecting on my role and what you tell me you need from me. If you are interested in being involved in any of these conversations, or knowing more, please let me know.

So, that's it for now. It's just left for me to say a big thank you to everyone who has found time to have conversations with me and to welcome me back over the last 10 weeks. It's those conversations that prompted me to write this and to share. I hope what I've said is useful and interesting. I'll post something again in a couple of months.

I hope you're already members of the VCSE Leaders' Network WhatsApp group, if not do let me know. You can follow me on Twitter [@keighley\\_sam](#); the VCS Alliance twitter account [@TheVCSAlliance](#); or Community First Yorkshire's twitter account [@CommFirstYorks](#)

Sam Keighley

Chief Executive for the VCS Alliance and VCSE health system lead for Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership