VCSE Vaccine Champions to boost awareness and uptake of life-saving immunisations in West Yorkshire communities

A new year-long programme is putting trusted community voices at the centre of efforts to improve awareness, understanding and uptake of important vaccinations across West Yorkshire.

Funded by NHS England, the programme launches this month with the support of West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the five local authorities across the region – Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. Delivery will be led by five Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs), bringing established community networks and trusted local relationships into the heart of the work.

At the centre of the programme are Community Champions – local people who know their communities, understand the issues that matter to residents, and are already part of the places where people live, work and connect.

Champions will help raise awareness of vaccinations, share trusted information, answer questions, offer support and connect people with the services available to them. They will also support people to access and use the NHS App, helping ensure communities can make informed choices about their health.

Listening as well as sharing

A key part of the programme is listening. Champions will create space for people to share their experiences, questions and concerns about vaccination, enabling open and honest conversations in familiar settings and make information more accessible, inclusive and relevant to everyday life.

The insight gathered will help partners across West Yorkshire better understand the real-world barriers that influence vaccine decisions, from practical challenges to confidence, trust and past experiences. We will work closely with Healthwatch Kirklees & Calderdale, healthwatchkirkleesandcalderdale.com who will support us to analyse the findings and turn the data into meaningful, community-focused insight. This learning will help shape future work and support wider efforts to reduce health inequalities.

A partnership rooted in local communities

The programme brings together the five LIOs~~)~~ across West Yorkshire: Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL), Voluntary & Community (VAC), VCS Alliance, Third Sector Leaders (TSL) and Nova. Together, they bring decades of experience supporting communities, with deep local knowledge and trusted relationships that make them ideally placed to lead this work. TSL Kirklees will coordinate delivery across the five local authority areas, working alongside the LIO network and a wider range of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and partners.

This approach recognises the vital contribution of the VCSE sector and the important role trusted local organisations play in reaching communities who may not always engage with traditional health pathways. It also strengthens relationships between the NHS, local

authorities and the VCSE sector, bringing different strengths and expertise together around a shared goal of improving health and wellbeing.

Steffi Rogers – Head of Health & Wellbeing, TSL Kirklees

"We're really excited to be working on this across West Yorkshire. We know that Community Champions can make such a difference because they are trusted, they are part of the communities they support, and they often have lived experience and speak the languages of those communities.

That means they are ideally placed to have conversations about vaccinations, share information, signpost people to support and help people access the services available to them.

Just as importantly, our Champions will be listening. They'll be helping us understand what people are saying, the questions they have and some of the things that might make it easier or harder for them to access vaccinations. That insight will be important in helping partners across the system understand what communities need.

We're proud that this work recognises the third sector as valued partners in improving health and wellbeing. We have a wonderful working relationship with our local authority and ICB partners, and we're looking forward to working together across West Yorkshire – most importantly, making sure communities are at the centre of the conversation."

David Smith, NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) Chief Pharmacist, said:

"Vaccination is the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill health, and vaccines prevent millions of deaths worldwide every year.

"Having real conversations with members of our diverse communities across West Yorkshire about their attitudes and experiences is crucial.

"Our trusted community organisations have the valuable insight and relationships to allow them to listen to people close to where they live. Through these conversations they can improve people's awareness, confidence in and access to vaccines, ultimately improving the lives of families across West Yorkshire."

Victoria Eaton, Director of Public Health at Leeds City Council, said:

"Like many parts of the UK, West Yorkshire is seeing lower vaccination rates across both routine and seasonal vaccines. Vaccination levels vary across different communities. Inequalities in vaccine uptake increase the risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, contributing to poorer health outcomes and wider health inequalities.

We know from successful Community Champion programmes across West Yorkshire that trusted local people can make a real difference. By working closely with communities, they can help answer questions, build confidence in vaccines, improve access to services, support people to get online, and provide valuable feedback about local needs and concerns.

The West Yorkshire Community Champions Programme will create a joined-up approach across all five local authority areas where vaccination uptake is lowest, helping us listen to local

people, understand the barriers they face, and make it easier for everyone to access vaccination services."

Find out more

For further information or to discuss involvement in the programme, please contact Steffi Rogers at steffi@tslkirklees.org.uk



Figure 1 - West Yorkshire Vaccine Champions Logo