# VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise) Mental Health Resilience Forum 9th September 2022 Briefing

## Background

The Mental Health Resilience forum has been convened as a Community of Practice by One Knowsley.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, One Knowsley facilitated a range of Community of Practice forums along geographic and thematic groupings. Following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, these forums were paused, and a single emergency response forum was established by One Knowsley. This evolved into a Public Health Forum which continues today - facilitated by Knowsley Council.

Early in the COVID-19 crisis, increasing community need for mental health support from the VCFSE sector, the Mental Health Resilience Forum was established. This forum continues to grow with a current membership of 70+ organisations.

## Community of Practice – One Knowsley

What is a community of practice? The forum facilitated by One Knowsley acts a community of practice. One Knowsley’s support and development of the VCFSE sector is framed around networks that enable peer support. The model develops and strengthens VCFSE networks and enables access to resources including time, skills, knowledge, and insight. Promotion and enhancement of best practice models across VCFSE organisations is a key outcome of the community of practice. This approach enables One Knowsley to deliver targeted approaches to providing timely advice, information and guidance whilst promoting connectivity, partnerships, and collaborations. Communities of Practice are a powerful space to listen to the collective voice of VCFSE and enable amplification of voice through One Knowsley’s representation role as Place Lead for VCFSE in the borough.

## Insight Methodology

Alongside insight conversations in group settings of forum members, the forum met on Friday 9th September at Court Hey facilitated by the Sector Resilience and Capacity Building Manager in One Knowsley, Paula Kearns.

The facilitated discussion covered 4 key areas of exploration: 

* Has demand changed e.g., resulting in a change in volume or complexity of referrals?
* Lessons learnt from the pandemic that can be applied to the Cost-of-Living Crisis
* What does good prevention look like?
* What do you need from One Knowsley / Key Stakeholders (in support of your work)

The collective responses across both approaches are captured within this briefing.

## Response

Key responses are detailed below and can be summarised against emergent themes of:

* Complexity in demand
* What good looks like from a VCFSE lens
* The impact of the right money at the right time to deliver interventions for VCFSE
* Supporting VCFSE responses.

## 4.1 Demand is increasing alongside increasing complexity in the needs of the individual

* Sector is well placed to deliver Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, Tiers 3 and 4 are being pushed into the sector due to lack of public sector inventions
* Need more doers! Not more sign posters! To respond to increasing complexity in demand.
* Support and Capacity Development of VCFSE is key
* Cost of living crisis is a known and recognised factor in increased demand

Referrals to VCFSE have increased with varying mental health issues in the past year, of which the complexity can waver from those who need a little help, to people who need residential help. External factors of the emergent cost-of-living crisis coupled with a world emerging from the pandemic has created snowball effect on people and their mental comfort.  

*‘Our clients cannot afford to live!’* 

This was a quote made by a participant to the forum who claims that the cost-of-living crisis means that their beneficiaries cannot afford to get both the basics done and have money for anything else which may enrich their lives. Social and financial pressures are resulting in widening health inequalities and spiralling mental ill-health.

## What good looks like

* Disconnect in what good looks like, measures of success for VCFSE interventions have a different starting point to public sector (e.g., reduce hospital admissions)
* VCFSE is holistic, measures of success need to be rooted in the positive outcomes for the individual and the wider community not driven by public sector pressures (as above point)
* Data needs to include insight from the sector

While we move into a brave new world of technology, green living, and online communication - we need to realise everybody moves at different paces and has different ranges of ability regarding tech. This may range to how information is received by a person, to how they outwardly communicate… and even check ins to medical/health centres. A period of levelling up and knowledge sharing is needed to mitigate concerns of digital exclusion. 

Let us not stop signposting but make it more effective!

One thing that came up during the forum was how overwhelming signposting is, almost leading to people becoming sign blind! To move forward effective signposting will be needed via a strong central database of people to access, enhancing established social prescribing, and creating more capacity to deliver high-quality interventions *‘we need more doers!’* 

Innovation in the VCFSE ability to flex and respond to create and deliver interventions that are meaningful to beneficiaries is a key asset of the sector. The ability to deliver holistic interventions that are accessible and framed within interventions that blend positive activities that are accessible and responsive with agility. This was felt to be reflected in the growing and diverse offer within the forum membership. Further the VCFSE approach to create holistic interventions through collaborations with each other was seen as a powerful measure of good practice that could be replicated across other stakeholder partnerships.

## The right money at the right time

* Commissioning Specifications can stifle the breadth of outcomes the sector can deliver.  Co-design of specifications is crucial
* Trust VCFSE to deliver
* Commissioners need to be proportionate with the paperwork!
* Monitoring and Evaluation needs to be proportionate to the scale of the intervention commissioned
* Core costs being covered is key, they are indirect delivery costs

During the forum it was revealed that many felt there was more ‘trust,’ during the pandemic, specifically with funding and how VCFSE self-organise. However now it has been reported that slowly and surely heavy bureaucracy has crept back in, which adds many layers into prevention and treatment via providers, leaching away limited capacity to deliver because of the time and resource implications involved in responding to funding opportunities.

Contract flexibility enables VCFSE to plug gaps when support is needed for people who do not particularly fit into boxes to be ticked. As the complexity of the issues becomes more wide ranging, we need to realise that box ticking missions and stiff contracts will not work, we need to notice those who fall into the grey areas and can quickly flex and respond.

## Supporting VCFSE responses

* Role for One Knowsley to enable and support collaborations (e.g., networking opportunities, promoting group setting offers)
* Charitable Trusts and Foundations enable the innovation and creativity of interventions; however, this is a limited funding landscape.
* Challenges with accessing funding, can public sector help with capacity?
* Trust the insight from the sector about the best way to secure outcomes

The role of One Knowsley as the VCFSE / borough’s social infrastructure support body was discussed at length.

Firstly, One Knowsley can help with continuing to provide Social Prescribing. It was felt that models like One Knowsley’s work… the right referral at the right time (for the individual and the group setting) with capacity building support to the group setting from One Knowsley model, rather than other models which can overwhelm the sector with signposting. Learning from this model should be promoted and cascaded to influence approaches to working with VCFSE that secure strong outcomes (resilience and capacity) for group settings.

One Knowsley can help with distribution of communications on a timely basis, making sure all are aware of the resources available and that can be shared, creating *good practice,* and promoting the use of Court Hey for VCFSE use, enabling more face-to-face networks and wider networking opportunities to take place.

Charitable Trusts and Foundations enable the innovation and creativity of interventions; however, this is a limited funding landscape, creating challenges with accessing funding, can public sector help with capacity? We need to explore the idea of collaborating with the public and private sector for funding from their charitable arms.

The role of the public sector included the approach to commissioning with co-design, early engagement with VCFSE and proportional funding models. Further the role of the public sector in enabling excellent quality signposting to the sector, trusting the expertise and professionalism within the sectors interventions was identified as a key enabler to VCFSE activity. Trust and parity in the relationship between VCFSE and public sector bodies was felt to be crucial but not always equitable in group settings.

## Summary

VCFSE responses are increasing to respond to growing demand and complexity in demand however an overwhelming view was that there is an increasing amount of signposting to VCFSE settings resulting in many forum members delivering interventions above group capacity without appropriate resource including relationships with sign posters.

A supportive and enabling funding approach will increase capacity within VCFSE which is under significant pressure as it continues to respond to presenting need outside of resourced capacity.

Accessing funding without bureaucracy is crucial to maximise efficiencies for VCFSE group settings and unlock capacity.

There is a clear role in public sector organisations facilitating VCFSE responses through trust, co-design of interventions and proportional and enabling commissioning approaches.

The strength of the agility and innovation as seen within the growing interventions offered by VCFSE to respond to presenting mental health needs in communities alongside the strength of collaborative holistic support is a key asset to be built upon.

## Racheal Jones – CEO (Chief Executive Officer), One Knowsley

## Paula Kearns – Sector Resilience and Capacity Building Manager, One Knowsley

## Jim Bridson – Sector Development Worker, One Knowsley

# With thanks to members of One Knowsley VCFSE Mental Health Resilience Forum