



**Mental Health Alliance**  
COVENTRY & WARWICKSHIRE

DEC  
2021

## **LAUNCH REPORT**

**'Collaboration can raise the profile of smaller organisations and showcase skills available across the sector!'**

# INTRODUCTION

PASTEL DECO & CO.

On the 21st October 2021, 23 organisations took part in the VCSE Mental Health Alliance (Coventry and Warwickshire) launch event!

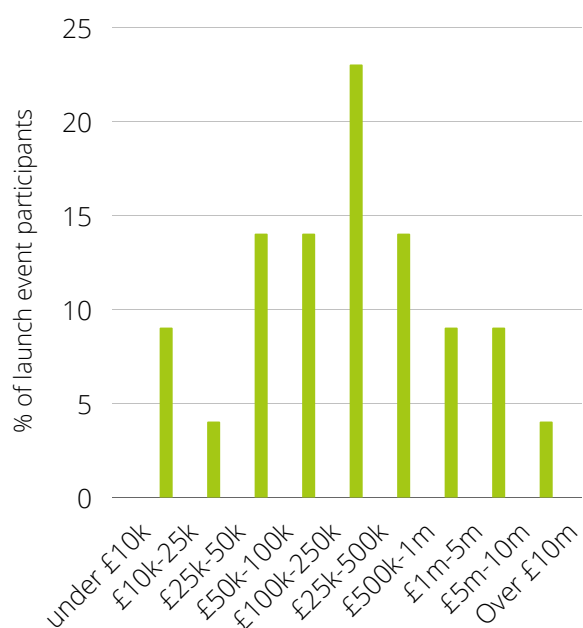
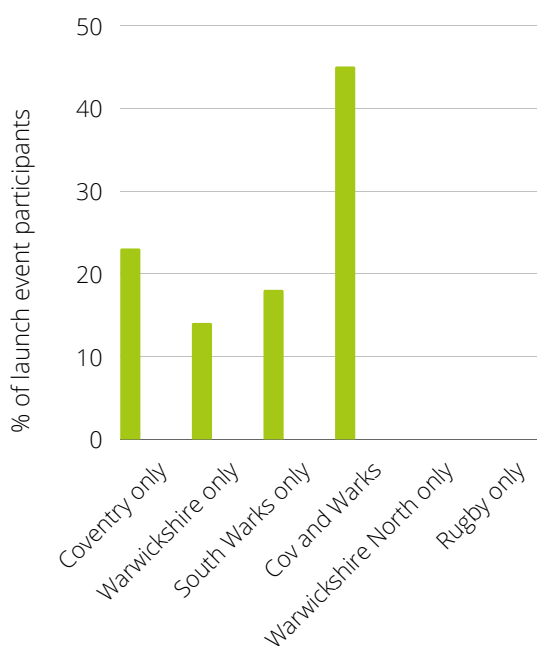
The launch was a huge success with great feedback from participants and we were delighted to be trusted with the valuable insight, knowledge and ideas from all 23 organisations on the topics of Collaboration, Communication and Funding.

This report will share the key messages within each of these topics and the action the alliance has taken towards addressing them.

Membership has now\* reached 46 organisations/groups and projects.

You can [check here](#) if your organisation is registered, if it isn't you can register by completing the [short membership form here](#)

By the end of the launch session 87% of participants understood the purpose of the VCSE Mental Health Alliance and how they could get involved!



\*as of 17th Dec 2021

# WORKSHOP FINDINGS

## COLLABORATION

### Values

The need to be inclusive, build relationships and develop trust, to be open in discussions and for members to be equal in weighting was repeated in discussions between all groups, setting out core values of inclusion, trust, honesty and equality for the alliance.

### Training

Whilst there was agreement that a collaborative approach to practical and experiential training, updates on legislation and possible support in the DBS check process offers clear benefits, there was also the suggestion of cross sector training on support/interventions/activities provided by the VCSE sector and what makes a good referral. It's worth noting here that in the past, statutory sector partners have expected VCSE orgs and groups to deliver training and shared learning for free.

**By working together we can highlight  
gaps in provision and work towards  
effective ways of filling gaps too!**

### Funding

Collaborative funding bids are advantageous both in sharing resources and providing a platform for those groups who might not meet certain size or risk profile criteria although the danger of organisations/groups remaining self focussed whilst funding pots decrease was highlighted.

### How can we progress a culture of collaboration?

Ideas included a Q&A forum, a policy bank, focussed networking asking 'what do organisations need?' a directory of member organisations/groups/projects, coffee mornings for practitioners to develop informal relationships and provide opportunities to talk about prevalent MH sector topics.

### Challenges

Although the collaborative vision was welcomed the list of challenges was plentiful, constant changes in personnel, the huge resource needed to develop partnerships, the time it will take to deliver the vast culture shift required and emphasising the importance of statutory partners taking steps towards meeting us in the middle!

# WORKSHOP FINDINGS

## COMMUNICATION

**There's a need for informal relationship building, to get to know each other!**

### **Opportunities**

Each group voiced a need for regular and varying opportunities to communicate as a sector across Coventry and Warwickshire as well as opportunities to communicate the sector voice to statutory partners. Suggestions included a 2-way digital discussion/messaging platform, monthly planned/themed meetings, shared learning sessions, feedback from members on meeting discussions from outside the alliance network, reference group updates, blend of face to face and virtual sessions, networking for signposting support, bio of each alliance member organisation shared between members,

### **Types/Methods of Communication**

Regular E-bulletins and emails are best as they can be digested at own pace. Make use of polls and E-surveys to garner an overview of the sector's perspective on any given topic, as long as they are short they aren't too onerous and draining on resources.

**'Use each other's social media profiles to share information across audiences, it sort of reinforces the collaborative culture change'**

### **Challenges**

Communication on a such a scale is always a challenge, how do you get every piece of information to everyone? It's great to have inspiring, passionate meetings but all too often there is no feedback, we don't know where our input has gone!

Duplication of networking type meetings drain resources and should be avoided.

Cross-sector communication can be difficult due to different language styles, there needs to be focus on accessible language for organisations/groups/projects of all sizes and experience.

**'Let's get the VCSE profile in front of decision makers!'**

# WORKSHOP FINDINGS

## FUNDING

### Challenges

A clear message of concern repeated throughout the workshops was that of **short term funding** not being in the best interest of our communities.

Specifically highlighted short term funding issues were

- service users being left to feel abandoned when short term projects end
- as opportunities for smaller grants/funding pots increase the associated bidding process drains resources of VCSE orgs/groups/projects that are already fighting to secure core funding costs
- it feels as though commissioners want to fund new things rather than developing existing services with proven benefit and need
- short term funding can feel like a tick box exercise rather than looking at the long term needs/benefits of service users.

Funding applications have long been an onerous and unpredictable task, again similar messages to those of short term funding in that funding opportunities don't feel like they're putting service users first.

Themes discussed were

- Submitting funding bids VCSE orgs/groups/projects can create a position of conflict, stuck between the VCSE need to fill gaps reported by service users whilst writing bids that meet specific funding requirements
- It appears that commissioners are unreasonably distanced from what is actually happening within front line services.
- It can be a challenge to illustrate the power of raising awareness/softer outcomes whilst also meeting funding requirements.
- Difficult to fit specific activities that will benefit service users into funding requirements
- Moving from grant funding to contracts could hit smaller volunteer led groups negatively

**Can larger organisations commission smaller pieces of work?**

**Can the alliance support with funding bids, small grants or funds to alleviate this resource pressure for smaller orgs/groups projects?**

# WORKSHOP FINDINGS

## FUNDING

### **Statutory partner relationships - influencing role**

Underlying the above funding challenges and potential opportunities is the notion that our statutory partners don't seem to understand or want to understand the VCSE sector, the Alliance was identified during discussions as a vehicle to provide insight and challenge current perceptions.

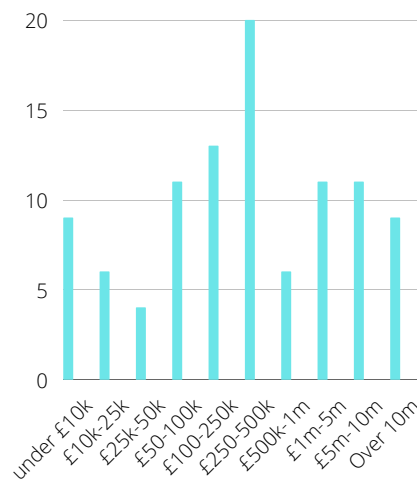
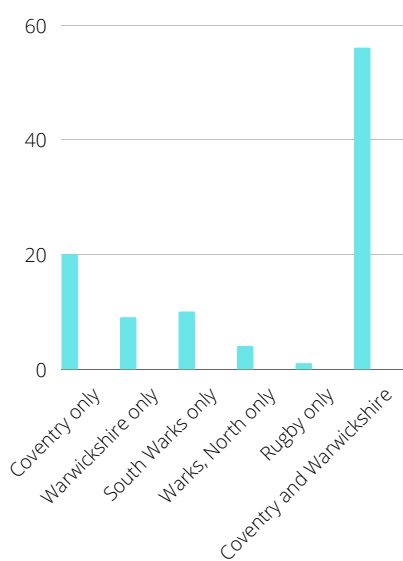
Topics that VCSE organisations/groups and projects want to see addressed by statutory partners include:

- the need for longer term funding opportunities
- acknowledgement/support for VCSE services/groups filling gaps for overwhelmed statutory services.
- effective communication with the VCSE sector that could address
  - the notion that commissioners don't have a complete view of support available that leads to duplicate services whilst there are blatant support gaps,
- signposting isn't free, it's a service too!!
- Tsunami of need
- Sharing skills/knowledge can be useful and productive - it doesn't all have to be about funding
- Recognition that core costs are required to keep organisations afloat too
- Expectations of statutory partners can be overwhelming for example when a target group is suddenly widened with no consideration of the consequence for the service delivery team or when contracts are rolled over unexpectedly for additional years with no financial consideration.

**A workshop facilitator noted a sense of hope/desire from members of workshop that alliance will bring opportunities for collaboration!**

# WE PROMISED ACTION!

The VCSE Mental Health Alliance continues to grow, since the launch the VCSE Mental Health Alliance has 46 organisations signed up as members.



## 'Let's get the VCSE profile in front of decision makers!'

The Alliance team will present the findings of this launch report to CWPT in January and will recommend that ahead of future VCSE sector engagement CWPT prepare their standpoint on pre-agreed topics, share how they intend to take action post discussion and how progress will be communicated with VCSE sector.

During alliance reference group meetings feedback is shared between members from various avenues both within the VCSE sector and across sector, due to the emerging integrated care system lots of these meetings have been through a setting up/preparatory mode, as they start to develop the reference group attendees will feedback key messages and will create a mechanism for sharing these messages with alliance members.

### Reference Group

You may have noticed the Reference Group invited applications to join them earlier in December, the new members will join the reference group for their first meeting in January!

# WE PROMISED ACTION!

## **Networking sessions**

The first one in November was attended by 14 organisations and had some great feedback!

'so great to be in a room with varied VCSE sector groups, thank you for making this possible'

'we know we're not the most diverse organisation and have struggled to know how to improve this, meeting the variety of groups in your networking sessions has the potential to be really valuable'

'we're used to networking but this is a different group of people to usual, so really valuable, thanks'

The next networking session will take place in January and will ask members to come prepared with answers to the following

- What is currently being offered by your organisation/group or project?
- What might your organisation/group or project need moving forward?

## **Seamless Signposting Session**

The first themed discussion session wasn't as well attended as it could have been although there was some great discussion, the alliance team are looking at how best to expand this discussion in order to gather concise information we can share with statutory partners.

## **Directory of member organisations/groups and projects**

The alliance team have been gathering short biographies of it's members and is currently looking into the best way to share this information.

*'we really look forward to seeing how the alliance develops'*

*'Partnerships are great but it takes alot to make it work!'*

*'we're so used to competing for funds, it's going to take time to adapt to being more collaborative, it's great to have the alliance supporting this!'*