

# Volunteer Centres and Community Learning and Development

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## 1 Introduction

This is the report of a research project carried out by Volunteer Development Scotland, with funding from Learning Connections, part of the Lifelong Learning Directorate in the Scottish Government in late 2007. It provides a record of the Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) research team's findings in terms of the relationship between the outcomes of Volunteer Centres (VCs) and the outcomes of Community Learning and Development (CLD).

### 1.1 Aims and Methods

The research aimed to gather more knowledge and awareness of the potential links between Volunteer Centres and Community Learning and Development. The key objectives were:

- To review the current relationship between Volunteer Centres and Community Learning and Development
- To map the type and extent of involvement that the Volunteer Centres have in Community Learning and Development
- To investigate whether and in what ways the outcomes of Community Learning and Development have synergy with the outcomes of volunteering
- To identify examples of and conditions for good practice.

The methods used were:

- An electronic survey to map the type and extent of Community Learning and Development in which the 32 Volunteer Centres were involved
- In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 staff from 9 Volunteer Centres

The interview questions drew on existing literature on Community Learning and Development. A pilot interview took place with a Volunteer Centre manager with a depth of experience of CLD which enabled us to review the questions and make amendments. The steering group also gave input to the questions asked in both the interviews and the electronic survey.

Interviews were carried out face to face and by telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Analysis was carried out using a thematic framework approach.

The nine Volunteer Centres chosen to take part in the interviews were chosen to provide a mix of urban and rural, large and small, standalone VCs and integrated VC/CVSs.

### 1.2 Terminology

The definition of Community Learning and Development used in the research covered:

CLD as a planning structure, this can be at an operational (local) level and at a strategic (city/area wide) level.

CLD as a profession

CLD as an outcome

CLD as a practice, either through training or project delivery.

## 2 Background

Community Learning and Development (CLD) is a key part of Community Planning. Community Planning is a principle mechanism for improving public service delivery and ensuring communities have a role in decision making. The Scottish Government has identified CLD as vital to the effective delivery of policies for community regeneration, lifelong learning and young people. The Scottish Government appointed Volunteer Development Scotland to play a lead role in developing the new strategic framework for volunteer development in Scotland. In many cases an individual act of volunteering contributes to wider policy objectives set by the Scottish Government. Volunteering can contribute to a growth in the economy, delivering excellence in public services and supporting strong communities. The impact of volunteering on volunteers themselves also contributes to public policy objectives. Volunteering can help provide a route into employment, education or training and is particularly beneficial in developing softer skills such as teamwork, communication, confidence building, physical and mental well-being.

Volunteering also has a role to play in informing the development and delivery of policy. Volunteer Centres and volunteer involving organisations are often at the sharp end of policy implementation. For volunteering to reach its full potential it needs to be seen for what it is, a human resource; a way of enabling citizens to play an active part in their geographical community or in their community of interest. Given this, it is important to gather robust evidence that demonstrates whether and in what ways the outcomes of Community Learning and Development have synergy with those of volunteering and to identify examples of and conditions for good practice to further develop the relationship between Community Learning and Development and Volunteer Centres.

In 2003, Communities Scotland commissioned a study to examine aspects of the voluntary sector involvement in Community Learning and Development partnerships. This study produced the report 'A Rich Network: involving the voluntary sector in the planning of community learning and development' (Communities Scotland, 2005). The report made a range of recommendations to all parties involved regarding working better together in partnership. Where relevant to the findings of this study, these are referred to in this report.

### 2.1 Community Learning and Development

Community Learning and Development is an approach for working with communities. The publication of 'Working and Learning together to Build Stronger Communities' (Scottish Executive, 2004) states

"Community Learning and Development describes a way of working with and supporting communities. We see community learning and development as central to – 'social capital' – a way of working with communities to increase the skills, confidence, networks and resources they need to tackle problems and grasp opportunities."

It also specifically mentions VCs as having a key role at strategy levels of local CLD partnerships.

The guidance provides three national priorities for CLD

- Achievement through learning for adults – Raising standards of achievement through learning for adults through community based lifelong learning opportunities incorporating the core skills of literacy, numeracy, communications, working with others, problem solving and information communications technology.
- Achievement through learning for young people – Engagement with young people to facilitate their personal, social and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence and place in society.
- Achievement through building community capacity – Building community capacity and influence by enabling people to develop the confidence, skills and understanding required to influence decision making and service delivery.

All Scottish Local Authorities provide a range of services delivering youth work, adult learning and community development. In many, but by no means all, these are located in a CLD service. However these are not the sole providers of CLD work. Indeed CLD is provided by a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. Community Learning and Development as a structure is co-ordinated at Local Authority level through Community Planning, often through CLD partnerships.

CLD strategies are expected to

- set out the joint vision of Community Planning partnerships for CLD
- highlight the priorities for CLD in relation to the three national priorities
- detail the partners involved and the operating principles they follow
- set a framework for operational planning of CLD
- aim to identify overall levels of investment and resources, including staff to be provided by partner organisations

While all Community Planning partnerships support the CLD partnerships to drive the process of creating and implementing the CLD strategies, the process of developing the content of CLD strategies varies widely.

## 2.2 The Volunteer Centre Network

The Volunteer Centre Network is core funded by the Scottish Government. There is a Volunteer Centre in every Local Authority area in Scotland and the majority of VCs are stand alone organisations. However, in some areas, the Volunteer Centre is an integrated organisation with the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and in others, the VC is part of a wider organisation such as a local development agency.

The Volunteer Centre network plays a crucial role in creating a Scotland where everyone who wants to volunteer can do so. One example of this is the website [www.volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk) a resource which links individuals with volunteering opportunities, and organisations with volunteers. The network works in partnership with VDS to deliver the Scottish Executive's (now Scottish Government) Volunteering Strategy (2004). The key intended outcomes of the strategy are

- More volunteers from diverse backgrounds
- An increased range of young Scots aware of volunteering and the benefits it brings to volunteers' communities and organisations and an increased awareness amongst young people about how to access volunteering
- Increased range of adults aware of the benefits of volunteering and how to get involved
- Experiences that match the needs, aspirations and lifestyles of volunteers
- Improved opportunities for skills and personal development through volunteering
- Higher standards of volunteer management in both public and voluntary sectors
- A higher proportion of organisations operating inclusive practice
- Improved understanding of the relationship between volunteering and social security benefits amongst volunteers and those who advise potential volunteers
- More effective measurement of policy which impacts on volunteering and Scottish Government investment in it
- Better evidence with which to identify priorities for the Scottish Government interventions to embed a robust culture of volunteering in Scotland
- More effective Scottish Government policy interventions to support quality, inclusive volunteering.

The Volunteering Strategy has four strands:

Strand 1. Focusing on Project Scotland and young people

Strand 2. Dismantling barriers to volunteering and closing the opportunity gap

Strand 3. Improving the volunteer experience

Strand 4. Monitoring, evaluation and ongoing policy development

It is through these four strands that the Volunteer Centre Network aims to contribute to the outcomes of the strategy.

The LEAP (Learning, Evaluation and Planning) Framework is used as a means of evidencing progress against the four strands of the strategy. In 2003, the framework was adapted for volunteering and enables VCs to report progress against the four strands of the Volunteering Strategy as well as the VC standards.

More recently, one VC has piloted the HMI framework 'How Good is Our Community Learning and Development?' The framework was used within the context of the VC with appropriate research questions developed to reflect the areas of activity that the centre was involved in. Further development of this pilot could see it being developed as part of a set of tools used by the Volunteer Centre Network to evidence progress and support evaluation within the network.

### 3 Findings

This section of the report draws on both the interviews and the online survey.

#### 3.1 Understanding of Community Learning and Development

Respondents had a very clear understanding of what CLD was as an outcome, as a practice, as a profession and as a structure. There was a theme of it being a journey of life long learning, learning that was about personal, social and community development, participation and empowerment. The learning, whether formal, informal or non-formal, had to start where people were at in order to engage and enable them to take up opportunities. This was described by one interviewee as being a way of "taking people from point A to point B". This ties in with the notion of a journey, with specific reference to that journey being shaped by the individuals' choices and the experiences that they have. It was also recognised that individuals can engage at a variety of different levels.

However, there were some tensions identified around understanding of CLD. In some cases this was around the language used for the different aspects and components of CLD; as an outcome, practice, profession and structure. In some geographical areas there was no clear definition of CLD due to the range of organisations involved and the shifting local landscape. In some cases, this caused the VC some difficulty in engaging. There was also some confusion due to perceptions that CLD was historically 'a courses and classes thing run by the council or Community Education Department'. CLD is sometimes both the name of the local strategic partnership, and the part of the council that delivers what was previously known as Community Education. However, respondents expressed opinions that it went beyond this, and encapsulated other forms of learning. In particular that it was around "learning that is non formal' and 'not just numeracy and literacy... I think it goes beyond that".

Indeed, it was viewed to cover a wide range from informal learning in the community, to formal course based learning as well as in some cases, being a service provided by the Local Authority. As detailed by one interviewee:

"It's a way of encouraging adults, young people, community groups and organisations to engage with any kind of learning, usually informally in the community. It can range from learning new skills from each other, on the job as it were, to more formally accredited stuff through college. Structurally, it's basically... a service through education, the community education dept in the Local Authority or community development which is part of social work services".

### 3.2 Synergy between CLD and volunteering outcomes

Many VC managers expressed the opinion that all the work of the VC fits with the ethos of CLD and as such, did not see specific projects as being 'CLD' or otherwise. It is interesting to note that some VC staff had previously worked for a CLD service of the council or other CLD profession. As such, they had a more holistic view of how volunteering fits with CLD outcomes.

Amongst VCs, there was a significant consensus that the outcomes of volunteering and the outcomes of CLD had a distinct synergy with one another. One quote summed up the two aspects of the synergy:

"People get involved in volunteering to help deliver CLD outcomes and then there is the other side which is about volunteering itself in virtually every case giving people opportunities to learn things".

In addition to learning, volunteering builds confidence which is another key outcome of CLD. As detailed by one interviewee: "Improving self confidence and skills...the self esteem building and a little bit about moving towards employment".

Both volunteering and the practice of Community Learning and Development had outcomes around taking people from one point to another, building skills, confidence, esteem, participation and engagement:

"Our work is about empowering people to take a larger part in their community, whether that is formally or informally. Making sure everyone has the ability to volunteer, regardless of their age and status or the skills level that they have".

It was mentioned that volunteers also need support to engage and participate, that they often have personal and social development needs as well as literacy and numeracy needs. There was widespread agreement that volunteering gives people an opportunity to learn and that learning was often an integral, implicit part of volunteering. This learning takes a variety of guises as detailed by one interviewee:

"There are huge amounts of learning going on. Some in nationally structured organisations and sometimes its local people working together and learning together and sometimes the learning happens by default".

Again, there were some tensions around this synergy; in particular how the complementary agendas may cause overlap between local organisations and duplication of effort locally. In the case of one interviewee; "The relationship has been difficult. They [the CLD service of the Local Authority] think we are doing their work and that has always influenced relations".

Another interviewee mentioned the importance of dovetailing rather than overlapping; "it is critical to be working in partnership with other agencies, so that they don't

overlap". Perceived overlap can lead to competition in delivering local services, as well as bad feelings between the individuals involved.

### 3.3 Involvement in the planning structures of CLD

26 of the 32 VCs are involved in the planning structures of CLD, with the majority sitting on local partnerships with a CLD remit; either as a key partner or as an invitee. 12 of these VCs represent others at partnership meetings and have a mechanism such as an e-bulletin for feeding back to those they are representing. Some of the integrated VC/CVSs send someone to represent both volunteering and the voluntary sector, and in a couple of cases, the VC might represent the CVS at the table. However, this is more common in rural areas, and seems to be an informal arrangement.

10 of the 32 VCs are represented at the planning structures of CLD, the majority by the local CVS, and others through local representation mechanisms in place for the voluntary sector. However, less than half of these receive any feedback from meetings, and some feel unable to feed into these structures as a result.

In some cases, involvement is linked to having the time and resources to be involved with all the various fora. This means that work has to be prioritised in terms of relevance and capacity; "we seem to have quite a complex CLD structure, which means that we are on about four or five different committees within it, so it is quite time consuming".

Where the CLD structure is extensive, e.g. in city areas where there are a variety of local plans feeding into a city plan, VCs have to prioritise staff time to where it is used most effectively which can lead to some disconnection between the strategic and operational strands of CLD. Where there is a less complex structure in place locally, and the VC has the capacity to engage, there are positive examples of involvement in both the strategic and the operational:

"We have representation on the main CLD partnership, each of the VC co-ordinators sit on their local CLD area group and work directly at an operational level. We also have representation on the three sub groups through our parent body. We are very much tied in at the operational right through to the strategic".

This example was a joint VC/CVS which used its integrated approach to its advantage in influencing at different levels. The issue of representation at the CLD table interrelates with representation mechanisms of the voluntary sector. Having large numbers of organisations around a table can be unwieldy and lead to unproductive meetings; therefore local areas have representation structures in place. These can be formal, with set feedback mechanisms, or more informal and ad hoc. Decisions of representation are often historical and rarely reviewed which means that new organisations can struggle to find their place. As such, organisations feel the need to attend meetings as they may not feel they are being appropriately represented (Communities Scotland, 2005: 16).

Often it seems that the CVS takes the role of being the voice and conduit for the voluntary sector, particularly at a strategic level. In some areas this arrangement works

well as there are mechanisms for representation and feedback, although in others there seems to be room for improvement around these mechanisms. In some areas it seems that both the CVS and the VC can and do sit at the various CLD tables although in others it seems that the VCs struggle with demonstrating the need for them to be there in their own right:

“It’s not that I haven’t tried to make representation with the council at every level, I’ve tried to get across that the CVS and the VC have a very distinct role to play in the community but that hasn’t cut any ice so far”.

It was noted by some VCs that despite their being unable to be involved in the overarching structures of CLD, the Youth Development Worker had input to youth strands of the CLD structures.

Changes to administrations and structural or personnel changes within the councils seem to be either a threat or an opportunity to VC involvement in the planning structures of CLD. New staff in CLD can move the relationship with the voluntary sector forward, ignoring any historical precedents of who is welcome at the table.

Alternatively, changes can lead to stagnation of developments around CLD, which can leave VCs out of the picture and cause difficulty in being accepted back around the table when work restarts. In some cases, where the council has undergone organisational change, and CLD services have been impacted by this, it can effect attitudes to partners. Some CLD structures have lost resources, particularly staff resources through changes within local government. Also, reorganisation has in some cases left CLD without a natural ‘home’ in the council. This has caused concern for staff, which has an effect on partnership working:

“So you have lots of CLD staff feeling slightly uncomfortable about their own roles and positions which means it becomes difficult for them to engage with outside partners because they don’t know if they are going to have a job next week”.

Linked to this is the territorialism issue, where CLD can see the voluntary sector as a threat which doesn’t pave the way for positive partnership working:

“There is sometimes a danger that CLD staff feel that the world of volunteering and the voluntary sector is a threat and that means we have to be careful about how we work with them and manage that relationship”.

The following example is of a project undertaken by a VC, which has had some resistance from the local CLD service.

#### Practice example – management committee support and training

A project which a VC has been contracted to deliver by the council. The VC is in a large urban area and sits on the CLD partnership.

The project looks at volunteers on boards and the skills required to be a management committee member. Legally all board members are volunteers, and so need support to enable them to govern effectively. A lot of boards are not given the support needed to operate properly due to lack of capacity, or lack of clarity over who should provide this support. This is particularly the case in small organisations with few paid members of staff. This is an area of tension and support need as a lack of support can lead to poor governance which can have a knock on effect on organisations.

The project helps to develop boards from where they are at, and to develop programmes on leadership, decision making, knowledge development and what it means to be on a board. Two days are provided annually for boards on skills development, promoting programmes such as Investing in Volunteers (IiV). It is recognised that volunteering on a board can bring transferable skills:

“The issues for a volunteer on a management committee or governing body needs to be recognised as a key community learning opportunity because all of these skills can be transferred”

The CLD service has questioned whether the VC should be doing this work as they feel it is stepping on their toes. Organisational change and displacement of the CLD service in the resulting restructure has caused tension with the voluntary sector.

There is a view held by some VCs that CLD is a service that is and should be provided by the council; “a function of the Local Authority, and they expect to see how we fit in with their function, rather than it being a cohesive system” and “The mind set of many of the players round the table is that CLD belongs to the council and it’s delivered by the council so to actually make it into an effective partnership has required quite a lot of work”.

This may be due to a lack of understanding of what the VC could bring to the table and the role it might have in meeting the outcomes of CLD. It seems, however, that once this issue has been overcome, partnership can change things for the better:

“We haven’t encountered any; we have been pushing at an open door from day one. And where we have been able to point out that they maybe haven’t considered volunteers perspectives, they absolutely have listened, taken that on board and readjusted their thinking”.

### **3.4 Benefits of VC involvement in the structures of CLD**

VC involvement at the CLD table means that volunteering is a consideration in discussions. However, beyond that, it is an opportunity for CLD partners to understand volunteering better:

“Often the perception is that volunteering doesn’t take much support. There is this attitude that volunteers will and do just get on with it, so there isn’t a perception that it needs a structure and it is a learning thing”.

In addition to understanding the needs of volunteers, VCs can help to change attitudes towards volunteering as an end in itself; introducing the idea of volunteering as a route to other developments:

“One of the things I have seen evolve over the years is people now appreciate that volunteering can be a step to other things, its not just about doing good, it can build skills, it can help people move from being unemployed into employment, it’s a bridging the gap sort of opportunity and we bring a whole different perspective for people”.

In addition, it provides an opportunity for VCs to demonstrate the wide reach of volunteering, particularly in where it meets CLD outcomes:

“I would like to think that they have got a broader understanding of the mass of CLD that goes on through volunteering and an avenue then to connect into and to connect to the agencies that we work with”

“There is an acknowledgement that volunteering is part of something that enables people to contribute and participate. You see it through how volunteering is written into plans much more”

VCs also work with groups that CLD hope to engage and therefore being at the table provides an opportunity to create partnerships in engaging these groups, and appreciate existing work by partners; “We have a whole lot of services that benefit the groups that they are working with; the socially excluded. We bring a wee bit [of] dynamism into Community Planning”.

VCs can also provide information about local trends and issues; providing a grassroots perspective; “Credibility, I think it gets knowledge and understanding about the way things are in the city and what is going on in the city”.

Also, some VCs saw their duty in ensuring that CLD was delivering outcomes in the area; “Our involvement makes sure that there is an outcome for the people in the area, rather than just outputs and the Local Authority being able to say it has met its obligation”.

Some VCs talked about the satisfaction they got from the real difference that CLD work was making in communities:

“That is always satisfying, to know that you have been involved in something that has made a difference at the end of the day, because quite often you can be sitting in a talking shop, and that certainly isn’t the case in CLD”.

The relationships built by partnership work are of benefit to all partners in securing delivery of services, additional funding and profile raising; “It’s good for raising profile and working synergistically together”. Another interviewee stated:

“Since I have become engaged in the city wide structure the VC has been much more connected with the CLD structure, so there has been better networking and cross referral”.

In addition to the increased profile and partnership, VCs see involvement in CLD structures as one of the many ways in which they can influence what is happening in their communities:

“We very much see ourselves as being part of the development of our communities and that’s probably what influences our desire to participate. And as I have said, the connections that you make when participating, both at an operational and strategic level, informing the development of service delivery is important from a VC perspective”.

It can also be an opportunity for the VCs to engage with new partners and build new relationships with those who they might not otherwise be able to access; “Met people that we wouldn’t be able to get a hold of any other way”.

One interviewee suggested some benefits for everyone around the table:

“I think in many ways we could continue to benefit from the skills that the CLD profession offers. and as a team of staff it could be the other way round, CLD staff could benefit from learning from us, their training could benefit from looking at the language we use, looking at what motivates people, why people do they things they do on a voluntary basis and what their needs are as individuals and what their support needs are and what barriers they may face. They would benefit from having that perspective. They could learn from training and selection issues, all sorts of issues we deal with from day to day, expenses and the language that is used”.

### **3.5 Relationships between involvement in the structures of CLD and practice of CLD**

25 VCs engage in CLD at the practical delivery level, including provision of learning opportunities locally, and specific projects such as youth development and IT training. For those VCs involved in the strategic planning structures of CLD the majority see a clear and beneficial relationship between this involvement and the practical delivery of CLD. In particular, involvement in the structures have been the driver in accessing opportunities for partnership as well as pots of money, e.g. from Communities Scotland. “Undoubtedly it has expanded the possibilities because a lot of partnership delivery has occurred because of the relationships built in the partnership”. For example:

“We got funding to work in partnership with local training providers to provide training awareness of ICT, particularly in the more remote areas so that kind of partnership working has arisen on many occasions”

The following example is of a project which came about through the CLD partnership.

#### Practice example – community newsletter

An example of the development of a community newsletter with young people in deprived communities. The VC/CVS is in a mixed urban/rural area and sits on the CLD partnership.

This opportunity came about through the CLD partnership with small amounts of money made available for development through Communities Scotland.

Local young people have had the opportunity to learn how to report on things and how to structure a newsletter. The community now has a newsletter that they previously didn't have.

The CLD partnership are now examining the potential for establishing community radio in a couple of deprived communities.

Some VCs talked of having access to opportunities as a direct result of sitting around the table:

"It came about due to being on the committees; we heard about the funding pot that came up and had an advantage for putting in an application for funding. It was precisely because I was around that table that I got to know about the funding".

There was acknowledgement that involvement increased their ability to make strategic connections, to create productive networks and relationships.

The following example demonstrates the practical benefits of partnership working.

#### Practice example – premises sharing with CLD partners

An example of premises sharing with CLD partners in local areas. The VC/CVS is in a mixed urban/rural area and sits on the CLD partnership.

The VC office is in an urban centre and partnerships made through engagement in CLD structures has enabled them to utilise office space in outlying areas.

Space has been accessed from both the council and local college at little or no cost. This has enabled the VC to access deprived areas, and to make their service available to individuals in their own communities.

Sometimes engaging with the structures of CLD, and the resources this required was seen to effect the ability to deliver on outcomes; "Sometimes I feel that we are hampered in meeting some of the outcomes of CLD in its widest context because we are so busy having partnership meetings". On the other hand, as one interviewee summed up:

"If there isn't a relationship between the structures and the outcomes, then something's wrong somewhere. Your structures have to be there for a reason and delivering on something".

Some VCs articulated that resources can be an obstacle to VC involvement in the structures and practices of CLD; often no additional funding is available to VCs to take

part in CLD and attendance at meetings and other input has to be prioritised alongside other work. As described by one interviewee:

“We don’t get resourcing directly to take part in any work; we manoeuvre some money from budgets. We do quite a bit of external work and income generate quite a bit of money, so we put some aside to go towards that”.

As mentioned previously, most VCs state that the outcomes of CLD and the outcomes of volunteering have a distinct synergy. As such, it is perhaps understandable why additional funding is not made available to pursue the outcomes of CLD if volunteering inherently meets those outcomes. The VC network works to the four strands of the Volunteering Strategy as their core progress indicators, and are funded to do so. These strands have synergy with the outcomes of CLD, but is it not specified that VCs should play a role in the structures of CLD, or the delivery of CLD projects. Scottish Executive guidance on Community Learning and Development, however, indicates that Volunteer Centres have a key role at the strategy level of local CLD partnerships (Scottish Executive, 2004).

However, it seems to be a widely held view that many of the projects run in the VC network contribute to the outcomes of CLD. Therefore, at the project level, although not additional to core work, wider outcomes are being achieved through volunteering. Where it seems that some VCs see the need for resources, is the piloting of new projects that meet the outcomes of CLD, but are not core funded. As one interviewee articulates:

“If we got more money, we would be able to do practical things to make the outcomes happen. At the moment our part is evidence, but we would be able to say ‘we can go and do that and we will report back’. We could pilot things”.

From a structural viewpoint, the majority of VCs engage (either individually, or through a representative) with CLD. It is recognised that this requires resources, mainly staff time. Where CLD is viewed as a priority, and staff time is available, VCs contribute staff time. However, it is recognised that the ‘core’ work of the Volunteering Strategy and volunteer support and placements are the VC priority:

“We’re stretched in many ways to being able to fulfil our basic functions; working with volunteers and volunteer engaging agencies and fulfilling the [Volunteering Strategy] strands 1 – 4, so strategic work such as CLD at a structural level tends to not be something we can take forward as a priority”

Some VCs, however, recognise the benefits that being around the table may have for access to project funding, information, or to find out what is going on:

“On a slightly less positive side, a lot of the partnership work takes place...because you can see what everyone else is doing. You get information you wouldn’t otherwise get if you didn’t go...also, to defend our corner”

Therefore, participation may not always be for positive reasons in cases where information is not otherwise shared locally.

### 3.6 Organisational structures and boundaries

The way in which organisational structures and boundaries mirrors or fits the structures and boundaries of the voluntary sector and the VCs seems to impact on the extent and ways the VCs can engage in CLD. For example, in a major city area where there are a vast number of local partnerships, VCs may be unable to attend all partnership meetings:

“Piecemeal, initially my involvement was to go to the local partnerships because that was where something was happening but I couldn’t be in 15 places at once. So we now have input in 3 but that’s only where we have local offices. So where we have officers working locally they go to the local partnership meetings and that works really well, but we can’t cover the whole city”.

In contrast, in areas where the structure of CLD better matches the structures of the VC, there may be a better ‘fit’:

“It’s very much helped by the way we are structured and the way the staff posts in the VC are designed. We’re designed to allow our staff to take a strategic view and to implement services locally and take responsibility for local issues. We have a core team of 5 volunteer organisers each of whom have a city area to cover, of which there are 5. So their boundaries are the same as CLD boundaries”.

There also seems to be the issue of credibility, being seen as credible partner and access to the various CLD tables. As described by one interviewee:

“There was a wee bit of friction between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector here for a while, I’m not going to say amateur but the statutory bodies tend to see the voluntary and community sector in a particular light, the charitable thing”.

This is reminiscent of the ‘clash of cultures between different sectors and agencies’ found in ‘A Rich Network’ (Communities Scotland, 2005:10). This suggests that there is still some misunderstanding of the Community Learning and Development partners’ contributions.

It seems the productive networks and partnerships are about having constructive individual relationships and the structures that support these. There was also mention of having doors opened where the individuals involved had past experience or links to CLD. However, it was recognised that individual relationships are only part of the picture and that structures have to be in place to support these when individuals move on and priorities change. As summed up by one interviewee, there is a need to establish and maintain good working relationships with partners:

“If you are able to establish good relationships with partners, then that helps tremendously. I’m not saying that it wouldn’t happen if you didn’t but it certainly opens a lot more doors than if you don’t. You need to develop a relationship that will withstand the original individuals moving on, that is key”.

### 3.7 Partnership working and joint training

As previously mentioned, involvement in CLD structures can open doors for VCs in engaging with project work, in particular in partnership with other CLD partners.

The following example is of a project that came about through the CLD partnership.

#### Practice example – Learning Passport

An example of a VC/CVS contribution in kind to a Learning Passport. The VC/CVS is in a large urban area and sits on the CLD partnership.

The VC/CVS is involved in the Adult Learning Action Network which pulled together a booklet detailing different learning opportunities for local distribution. A Learning Passport was created which enables tracking of any learning and development undertaken. The VC administrates the Passport and anyone undertaking any learning and development can have it accredited through the Passport and keep a track of what they have done.

It is hoped that this will provide better information locally on what happens to people as a result of learning, as this has never previously been followed up. It also provides a picture of engagement through all local providers such as the VC and the college, which wasn't previously available.

The database will provide data on numbers, activities and barriers which will allow for any necessary remedial action around provision and uptake. Agencies are responsible for getting individuals to sign up when they come through.

It is important to note that partnership opportunities can come about with CLD partners, even where the VC is not engaged at the structural level.

The following example is of a project that did not come about through the CLD partnership.

#### Practice example – numeracy and literacy

An example of partnership between the VC and the local college. The VC is in a mainly urban area and does not sit on the CLD partnership.

The VC provides a non-academic, user friendly venue for the Numeracy and Literacy Partnership in return for a small amount of funding. The service provided is bespoke to individuals needs. More recently, a qualified literacy tutor has been employed.

The local college has now been invited into the VC one day per week to provide a PC passport. It is hoped that the individuals who engage in the numeracy and literacy training will move into the college course to continue their learning. The venue and tutor are the same so it is hoped that learners will feel comfortable coming back.

The VC is keen to become an accredited learning centre and to develop the relationship with the college. This may mean provision of outreach training delivery in the community.

'Joint training or professional updating events, partnership workshops and the like can build relationships from which regular two-way communication is a natural outcome' (Communities Scotland, 2005: 17).

The following example demonstrates the practical communication structures that can be developed through partnership working.

#### Practice example – formalised cross referral

An example of a formalised cross referral structure. The VC is in a large urban area and sits on the CLD partnership.

GAPS (Guidance Access Points) came about as part of the Adult Guidance Network (a subset of CLD). Community Literacy and Numeracy, alongside Careers Scotland were keen to make better cross referrals between agencies, and so set up GAPS. In practice, it means that any agency involved in adult guidance becomes a member and cross refers to others.

The VC is a badged GAP agency which means if someone approaches the VC but it turns out they want a course, or career development, they are structured to refer them onto others. Likewise, if someone approaches an Adult Guidance partner, but it turns out that they want to volunteer, they would be referred on to the VC.

"Since I have become engaged in the city wide structure, the VC has been much more connected with the CLD structure, so there has been better networking and cross referral"

As a result of participating in the GAP network, 5 VC staff have accessed front line guidance training.

It seems that the availability of training is being extended to the voluntary sector in many areas although some VCs are still finding it difficult to tap into training provided by the Local Authority. In one example, through links with CLD, VC staff were able to access some training on mental health that was being made available to workers in the NHS. The VC benefited from this as they were then better able to understand the issues for clients with mental ill health who wanted to volunteer.

There seemed to be few co-induction and secondment opportunities although interviewees felt it would be a good opportunity for staff of all partners to develop. In one example, the councils newly established capacity building team spent half a day with the VC/CVS finding out more about their work.

## 4 Conclusions

Volunteer Centres demonstrate a very clear understanding of Community Learning and Development in its various forms. It is clear that there is a synergy between the outcomes of volunteering and the outcomes of CLD.

The majority of Volunteer Centres are involved in, or represented on, the planning structures of CLD. Representation of the voluntary sector is variable across Scotland, and seems to depend on historical factors and individual personalities.

Where the CLD service of the council has undergone organisational change and restructuring, there is a tendency for the voluntary sector, and volunteering, to be treated with suspicion; as a competitor for resources.

It is clear that VC involvement in CLD brings benefits to both the VC itself and the CLD partnership as a whole. Some of these benefits are around better promotion and understanding of volunteering and the role of the VC, while others are benefits to all members of the partnership such as raised profile and increased influence and innovation.

Involvement in CLD structures seems to provide VCs with opportunities for partnership working with other CLD partners. This can bring resources to the VC, or can involve VC contribution in kind.

There seems to be an anomaly between VC understanding of CLD being a core part of their business, and feeling that they are not adequately funded to carry out CLD work.

A range of factors have supported VC involvement in CLD. Scottish Government influence, including through the volunteering strategy, has assisted here. In addition, organisational structures and situations can help, e.g. joint VC/CVS or the physical proximity of partnership staff on a day to day basis; "Being in buildings with other organisations eases the flow of information".

Obstacles to VC involvement in CLD can include conflicting council and/or VC structures, situations or attitudes. For example, where staffing issues have led to lack of progress or cutbacks, or restructuring has led to uncertainty and a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities.

## 5 Recommendations

The study set out to find the conditions for good practice for joint working between VCs and CLD. As a result of findings, a few recommendations for the partners are presented here.

That there is clarity around the term CLD and its use in local contexts, bearing in mind the legacy of its roots in Community Education and its usage to represent a number of things, from a provided service to a way of working.

That CLD partners appreciate that VC structures and capacity may not fit neatly to providing representation at every level, and therefore work together with the VC to establish suitable ways of working. Where this takes the form of being otherwise represented mechanisms should be put in place for input from, and feedback to, those who are being represented.

That where VCs are unable to prioritise involvement in the structures of CLD, they seek to be represented, so that volunteering is a consideration and they are included in the information flow from CLD partnerships.

That CLD partners have an appreciation of the role that the VCs can play in enabling them to engage with traditionally 'hard to reach' groups, and make efforts to work together locally to ensure dovetailing of service provision rather than duplication of effort.

That working relationships and partnerships are taken into account during periods of organisation change, and are prioritised once change has occurred. Relationships should run deeper than the individuals involved.

## 6 References

Communities Scotland (2005) 'A Rich Network: involving the voluntary sector in the planning of community learning and development.' Communities Scotland. Edinburgh.

Scottish Executive (2004) 'Volunteering Strategy.' Scottish Executive. Edinburgh (now Scottish Government)

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