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## Brief Background

This is the summary 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).

\*The full report of this study is available from [www.vds.org.uk](http://www.vds.org.uk)

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## Main Findings

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Obstacles to VC involvement in CLD can include conflicting council and/or VC structures, situations or attitudes.

## Findings

### 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.

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.

#### Relationship between involvement in the structures of CLD and the 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.

## **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.

## **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.

## Definitions

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.

## 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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