

Carole's speech

Thank everyone for coming to VANL's 20th birthday celebration

Thanks go to past staff and Board members for joining us, each person having contributed so much to the development of VANL and its projects and the services which have supported so much positive change in our communities.

We also have representatives from 20 founder member organisations who along with a further 32 organisations are still loyal members after 20 years and a very warm welcome to them.

Finally before I move onto setting the scene for today's event we have 2 very special people who were involved with VANL's predecessor organisations who are still with us and a 3rd who has only very recently retired. **Allen Ransome**, our Chair who has helped to steer this organisation over the last 20 years good times and more challenging times alike and also chaired our predecessor organisation Glanford CVS for at least 10 years, and without whose support, life would have been very much harder for staff and Board alike. Big thanks to Allen

Next is **Liz Crowston** who started I believe as admin officer with Apna Sahara, a project of Scunthorpe CVS, which is the other predecessor organisation. Liz has held a few different

but related roles over that time, however is still with us and demonstrating daily her commitment to VANL and the local voluntary sector.

Finally **Carol Thornton** who up until very recently was a well known face providing development support and excellent news updates for all with an interest in our communities. Carol started her work with **Glanford CVS as an Admin** and became a development worker under the leadership of **Alice Akehurst** who was Director at the CVS and then went on to facilitate the merger and set VANL off on a very strong footing in its first 3-years.

Alice is with us and can I say she was a very hard act to follow!!! Welcome Alice.

Not wishing to slide into an **Oscar acceptance type speech** (largely because I have not won an Oscar!) there are many people who have contributed to the organisations successes over the years – staff, volunteers and Board – who deserve our recognition and thanks, to many to list, however you know who you are and more importantly so do we!

So onto the scene setting:

There have been **many changes in the sector since 1997**. In the early days before VANL came about, **the sector was truly independent**, from my memories working within the sector as a volunteer and almost volunteer being responsible for a Pre-school class of 24 i.e. not paid very much.

External funding tended to be largely grant and from the County and Borough Council, donations or a Charitable Trust and the former almost a given, with little in the way of reporting requirements. The **Sector was trusted** to do what it does best, improving the lives of its beneficiaries and that was what it did. However organisations largely worked in isolation, they did not seek engagement with decision makers or each other.

The **service providing part of the sector** was very small and usually part of nationals, if it existed at all.

The advent of the **National Lottery and the Community Fund** started to support higher ambitions in the sector, post 1994.

The **Borough CVS's** whilst **being relatively small had supported the creation of new voluntary sector** activity locally, including the establishment of new support services for disadvantaged people. Apna Sahara , created by by Scunthorpe CVS which carried over into VANL until its independence and Carers Support Centre in Brigg and the Rural Car Scheme in Barton, were created by Glanford CVS, both of which continue today.

I think on reflection the **big culture shift in thinking and action** around the voluntary sector came with the Labour Government in 1997, when there was a strong recognition of the worth of the sector in reaching those people that other sectors found difficult to engage and serve and also for its

role as expert commentator on the needs of disadvantaged people and communities.

The sector responded - elements readily, others with suspicion and caution.

VANL embraced the new environment as an organisation developing and transforming to support the sector to make the most of the new opportunities by providing specialist community development support and through CVS/VANL projects like the **South Bank Forum** and **FACT**, which brought organisations together who were interested in, or delivering Health and Wellbeing services, largely to amplify patient voice, through the sectors close connection with people and communities thus acting as a conduit for the statutory services to engage with the sector and their beneficiaries.

Partnerships and the language associated with partnership, was growing and the relationships with statutory sector were strengthening and in fact partnership was talked about much of the time.

Growth of the sector was fast, innovation reigned and communities were strengthened with well over a 1000 VCS organisations operating in the area as we moved through the 2000's. Volunteering was high and increasingly included those that wanted to volunteer to provide support on a professional basis in a service providing organisations like HomeStart, which also started under the CVS's umbrellas.

Cross sector partnerships flourished to the point where the area attracted substantial 5-year New Opportunities fund grants to create 2 Healthy living Centres, 1 being led by VANL, commencing in 2001 with cross sector delivery, including community groups and the other led by North Lincolnshire Council in Crosby, with the same mix of providers. Drawing down over £2 million pounds of funding to improve the health of the residents of the area.

The sector was included in developing Strategy and policy at all levels. Arguably not with the same level of influence, however we had a seat around the table.

VANL became a grant Funder itself in 2002, distributing funds to the local sector for good causes on behalf of the Primary Care Trust, and a number of North Lincolnshire Council pots including - **SRB round 6 funding, Aid to Communities, Energy Efficiency grants, Safer Neighbourhoods community grants.** It also included national and European funds like Global Grants and Community Champion, DeFRA rural pathfinder funds and Grassroots Grants and Targeted Support Fund and even a tiny bit of Primary Care Trust funding, peaking at around .5 million distributed in the year.

We created the Volunteer Centre in 2006 as part of Local Public Sector Stretch Agreement, and hit the very ambitious stretch of recruiting and placing around a 1000 new volunteers in well under 3 years. 1 Of the few themes to deliver the required stretch, earning a substantial **reward** for

the Council and a little sustainability for the Volunteer Centre.

Growth continued within VANL and consequently in the communities of North Lincolnshire, as we changed what we did to support emerging needs as the sector grew. All made possible by a range of external funding opportunities built on the stable local authority investment in the core of the organisation allowing this to happen.

However, arguably the funding that emerged from Government was **never sustainable** and delays in programmes meant that there were huge amounts of funding distributed to areas to be spent in a ridiculously short time frame, not only to the sector, but to other sectors and this led to unsustainable growth across the board nationally.

As resources shrunk post 2010 competition grew and cross sector partnerships were tested.

However **North Lincolnshire bucked the trend here, when thinking about partnerships between VCS organisations.**

Partnerships are growing and trust is high as we face a massively increasing call on our front-line organisations and projects. Only last week, **Andrea from the Forge** tells me that her service users have doubled in number, we know this is also the case in our Street Outreach project which works with sex workers.

Claire from Mind tells a similar story and they are not on their own.

The main issues are of lack of resource and capacity. And yet the sector is arguably more important than ever as the State draws back. The policy agenda for the transformation of the NHS points towards the strength of the sector in supporting the transformation of health services in the 5-year forward view and in the guidance for Sustainable and Transformation Partnerships. Is this taken seriously locally, a question for the panel I think?

Other questions for the panel perhaps:

Is the VCS and local Government becoming polarised?

The **discussion at the recent VCS Health and Wellbeing Alliance** meeting seemed to point to this. It feels like the sector has become irrelevant locally, especially **when we see the disinvestment in local voluntary action with our small but capable service providing VCS being severely under threat** – including VANL. **In favour of what?** In house local government delivery; is this the best and most cost effective way to provide services for some of our most disadvantaged people or our communities? Or maybe private sector suppliers, and the creation of wealth generate? Does this work in people services, particularly when thinking of our poorest people? The business world is surely dependent on markets and products that people will and can buy?

So is Social Enterprise the answer social enterprise being the solution to becoming independent from State funding?

Surely a successful Social Enterprise independent of State or charitable funding (if it exists) is dependent on the same market forces?

Is it not the State's role to ensure that all our populations have access to health and wellbeing services and equality of access to opportunities?

To end on a high – We have formed an alliance of VCS organisations to work with the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership at a place level, we have established new partnerships in the area, in neighbouring areas and wider, including with private sector companies.

We are as committed to tackling disadvantage and inequality as an organisation and as a sector as we have ever been. We embrace change and innovate readily. We are ever so slightly exhausted and sometimes angry!