

Working in Partnership

Thank you Carole for asking me to talk about working in partnership.

In some ways, VANL and Humber and Wolds have had a much closer relationship than many organisations as 20 years ago the Community Council for Humberside (as we were originally known) was one of the partners who facilitated the merger of Scunthorpe CVS and Glanford CVS which would eventually form into VANL.

The partnership between us has remained in place from that point on.

When I was thinking about why we work in partnership I kept coming back to Aristotle! Who quoted:

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts"

It means that there is such a connection among the individual items that it is better than what each one would be individually. Often referred to as 'synergy'.

During a period of time when resources are scarce and tenders, commissioning, grant funding and lack of money in the system creates competition between organisations it would seem logical that organisations would start to fight with each other over these limited resources and perhaps the quote I should have given was 'the survival of the fittest'.

However, there is increased recognition that by bringing our skills, experience, knowledge, networks and resources together, we all stand a better chance of not only survival but sustainability.

Now, this could simply continue to be about funding, several partners in a bid can mean 'a small part of something being better than a whole load of nothing' but mainly it is because we recognise that commissioners find the voluntary and community sector confusing and difficult to access, I often describe it as a multi-flavoured wobbly jelly, it is made up of lots of different chunks, some big, some small, all contributing something slightly different to the overall 'flavour' and look, and you just think you've got it and it changes shape..... again..

By the sector working together we can:

- all contribute what we are good at
- larger organisations can support smaller organisations, something that VANL has done for North Lincolnshire throughout it's 20 years
- different organisations can invest in and share resources (whether that is equipment, people (staff and volunteers), policies, venues, good practice or ideas) spreading both costs and expertise across a partnership.

So internally, within the community and voluntary sector we are stronger.

Just as importantly for our external and wider partners, it easier for them to connect with us, they don't have to work their way through a whole range of different organisations to find the right person or group to speak to.

Formally created partnerships, particularly during a tendering process means that commissioners only have to deal with a lead supplier we therefore become much more accessible, interesting and attractive.

So as VANL was being created, Humber and Wolds may have been described as the 'birthing partner' but as we have changed, grown and developed our relationship has also matured.

We are now more like siblings, there are moments when we disagree, there are periods of time when we have no contact at all but when we need each other we know we are there for each other. We identify opportunities and encourage each other, we share responsibilities, we know we can contact each other, talk something through, decide whether to work together on an opportunity (or not).

We now have an extended family, with other 'siblings' joining us in the creation of an 'North Lincolnshire VCS Health and Wellbeing Alliance'. Facilitated by VANL, bringing together key provider organisations, this partnership is about much more than 'funding'.

Together we are able to we can:

- raise the profile of the voluntary and community sector at a strategic level,
- we can share resources,
- help each other attain quality standards,
- provide a point of contact for public and private, commissioners and providers,
- creating an opportunity to respond to increased demand on services through a co-ordinated and innovative 'offer'.

So as we celebrate VANL becoming 20 years of age, we know that through support, good communication, pro-active engagement, trust and transparency (and the occasional healthy argument!), our extended and extending family will continue to grow, develop and mature.

If you would like to find out more about the 'North Lincolnshire VCS Health and Wellbeing Alliance please come over to the table.....and speak to Trudy or myself.