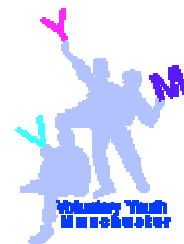


CONFERENCE REPORT

Growing Success:

***Strengthening the Voluntary and
Community Sector for Children
Young People and Families in
Manchester***

21 April 2008



Purpose of the Day

On Monday 21st April 2008 we held our annual children, young people and families conference at Manchester Town Hall. This was organised in partnership with the Child & Family Support Forum (MACC), Voluntary Youth Manchester and Children's Services and provided an opportunity to come together to look at the strategic agenda from a voluntary, community and faith sector perspective. The event was well attended with nearly 100 delegates from both the voluntary, community and faith sector and the statutory sector.

The event highlighted the opportunities and challenges being faced by the sector as we are required to respond to the Every Child Matters agenda and operate in the changing context of the Children's Trust and district level working. We looked at what we need to do to improve the sector's ability to meet the needs of children and families, as well as how we can influence the strategic agenda.

In the morning we had presentations from Mike Livingstone (Asst Director Children's Services); Kathy Brown (VCS Strategic Lead) and Dave Packwood (VCS Engage), followed by discussion groups, the content of which is documented in the following report.

Afternoon workshops focused on how we can stimulate collaborative working between VCFS and statutory partners on key elements of Children's Trust Arrangement such as safeguarding, prevention, the common assessment framework and lead professional, family support, partnerships and collaboration and integrated youth support services.

If you were not able to attend the conference but would like more information about the content of the day please contact:

Ruth Craven
Child & Family Support Forum
MACC
0161 834 9823
ruth@macc.org.uk

Ross Grant
Voluntary Youth Manchester
0161 832 0169
voluntaryyouthmanchester@gmail.com

Graham Mellors
Head of Strategy and Performance
Children's Services
Manchester City Council
Overseas House
Quay Street
Manchester M3 3BB
0161 234 7166
g.mellors@manchester.gov.uk

Many thanks to everyone who attended the conference and made it such a valuable experience. Organisations were represented on the day from:

42 nd Street	Manchester PCT Community Health
4CT Limited	Manchester Play Team
Assistant Director, Children's Services	Manchester Young Lives
Barnardo's	MCC - Homelessness
Benchill Ecumenical Services Scheme	MCCR
Big Life Services	Moss Side Adventure Playground
Black Health Agency	New East Manchester
CAN	New Heath Youth & Community Centre
Care for the Family	One Parent Families/Ginger Bread
Carisma	Pops
Catholic Children's Rescue Society	Rathbone
Children & Young People's Partnership - MCC	Reachout
Children's Services, MCC	Resolutions First
Children's Society	Save the Children
Chorlton Youth Project	South Manchester Regeneration Team
CN4M	Sowing Seeds
Community Foundation for Gtr Manchester	Starting Out
Contact A Family	Sure Start Family Support Team
Cool Services/Professional Bureau	The Mustard Tree
Community Safety Network	Ujima
Delivering Inclusion Network	Unity Arts Organising Group
Depaul Trust	VCS Engage
District Project Worker	Voluntary Youth Manchester
Domestic Violence Outreach Team	Wai Yin Chinese Women Society
Early Year's Service, Children's Services	Women's Action Forum
Fairbridge in Greater Manchester	Wythenshawe Community Initiative
Family Welfare Association	YASP
Gaddum Centre	YMCA Training
GMCB of People Living with HIV	Young People's Support Foundation
Home Start Manchester South	Youth Service
IMPACT	
Indian Association Manchester	
Kurd Saylee Society	
LSEN	
MACC	
MANCAT	
Manchester Care & Repair Ltd	
Manchester Carers Forum	
Manchester Community Health	
Manchester Deaf Centre	
Manchester Libraries	

VCFS Strategic Engagement Update

(Kathy Brown, VCS Strategic Lead)

Since September 2007, I have been in the VCS Strategic lead role, and this is the first time that this role has been carried out in Manchester, on behalf of the Voluntary and Community Sector. Manchester Alliance for Community Care (MACC) have managed this process, and I have been seconded from Barnardo's North West into this post for two days a week. A Reference Group has been formed to oversee and support the work of this role, and members include Graham Mellors, Manchester City Council, Martin Duffy from VYM, Mike Wild, Ruth Craven, MACC and Shirley Adams from the Gaddum Centre. In September 2007 we made a realistic plan for the funding which was initially to March 2008. We decided to concentrate on four areas of work:-

- Communication issues both within the sector and between Voluntary Sector and Manchester City Council
- Funding issues in a year of transitional funding
- The district structures
- Support for the VCS infrastructure

Communication Issues

The VCS has been represented on the Manchester Children's Board over the past year, and we decided to take a proactive stance to this work, by preparing a paper in September to put to the Board about the work of the Voluntary Sector over the year. This included proposals about funding, given that services were facing a transitional year of funding prior to commissioning being set up within the City Council. This placed the issues on the agenda, for discussion within the Children's Board, and a funding sub-group was set up to take this work forward. In addition to the Children's Board, I met individually with members of the Board, and with Assistant Directors in the City Council. Within the Voluntary & Community Sector, I have attended meetings e.g. Children & Family Forum Meeting, VYM Meetings, Safeguarding Sub-Group and District Representatives Meetings. There has also been a North West Network Meeting where people in strategic roles and other representatives can meet to exchange information between local authorities. Along with Ross Grant, I have attended meetings with the Youth Service and Connexions, and we have now established positive communication with these two organisations. Over the past few months, we have identified that several key groups are now no longer meeting e.g. the Youth Matters Group and the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership. This raises further issues about the representation of the Voluntary & Community Sector at strategic levels.

Funding Issues

We recognised that the funding issues were pressing for most services within Manchester, and this has taken up a great deal of time during the past year. As stated above, a funding sub-group has been meeting during the year, and this has involved representatives from the Local Authority and the Voluntary & Community Sector. In the first instance, an audit has been carried out about organisations that are funded from the City Council and for the first time this information has been collated. The group has further addressed urgent

issues about clear process for contracting with organisations, and for the first time, we are working towards contracts being in place for services by the end of June 2008. Discussions have also taken place about how contracts will be monitored, and the process for the next financial year has already been started. We have discussed the need for services to be able to move to long term contracts, now that more funding streams are known. The involvement of the Voluntary & Community Sector in decision making has been stressed, and the funding group and reference group have also identified the need for services to be developed so that they are ready when commissioning is in place. This will mean some capacity building for services in order to have business planning processes in place.

District Panels

In Manchester six district panels have been operating over the past year, and there are two Voluntary & Community Sector representatives on each panel. During this process, representatives from a voluntary sector have met on a regular basis to discuss common issues, and to share practice across the districts. Panels are currently engaged in developing a needs analysis and a district plan, which will reflect the needs in the local area. A future issue will be to develop district networks of VCS providers, and some discussion has now taken place about taking this forwards. Several issues have been discussed by district representatives including clarification about their role on the panels, and whether they would be involved in financial decision making regarding commissioning. There is also the outstanding issue of how city-wide organisations will be commissioned, in addition to the district structures.

VCS Infrastructure

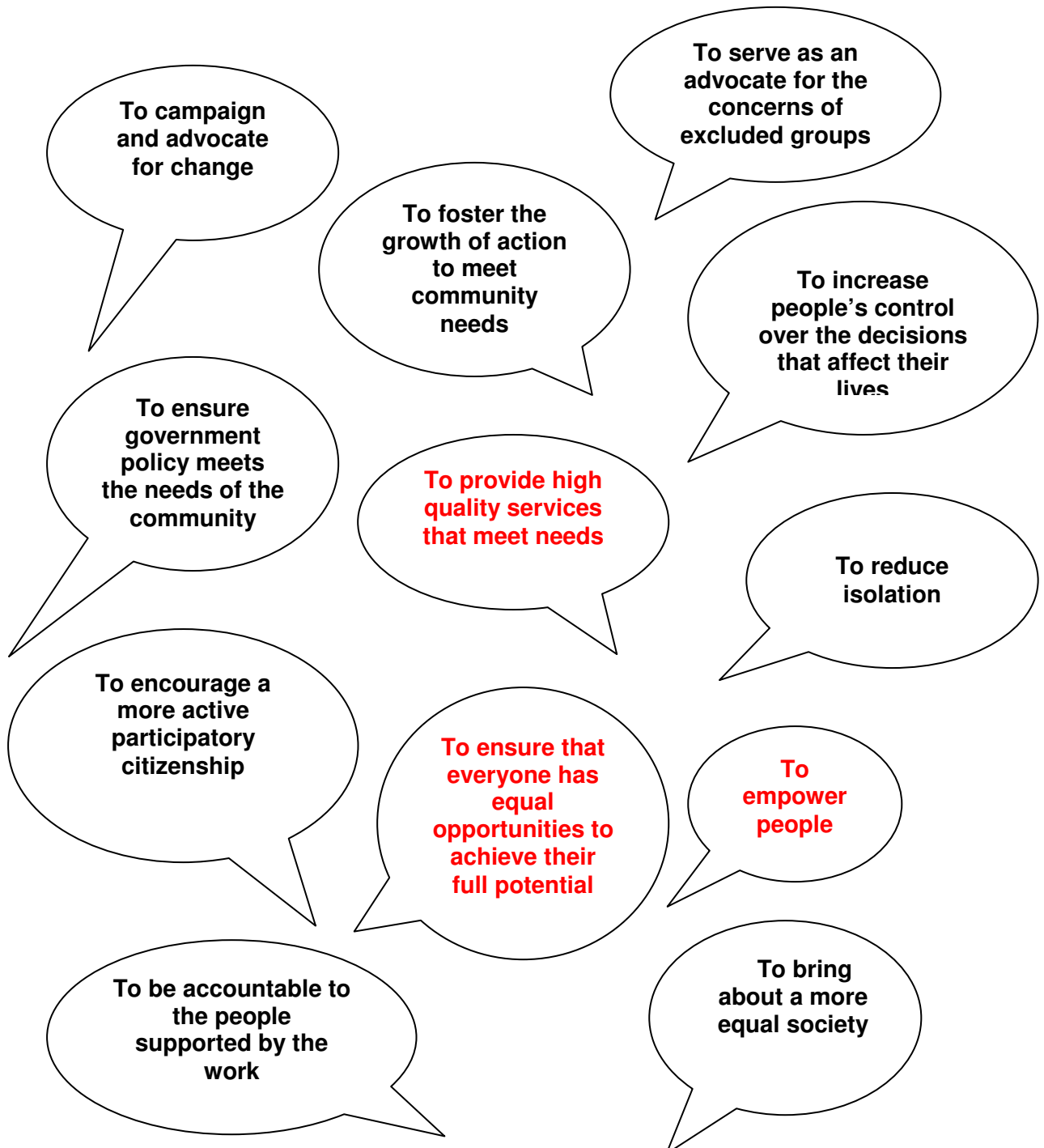
During this year funding has been available to support the strategic work. We have reported back to the Children's Board about how this funding has been used, and proposals for funding for 2008/09. We have identified several areas where increased resource is necessary e.g. helping to develop organisations to be ready for commissioning. We are pleased that the amount of funding for the infrastructure has now been increased for 2009, and plans are in place to take this work forwards within MACC.

Conclusion

Over the past seven months, we have developed the process to ensure that the VCS in Manchester is represented at strategic level. We have now laid the foundations for this process, by establishing clear communication channels with Manchester City Council and within the VCS sector. We have also started an important process about the funding of services during a transitional year before commissioning procedures are in place. This is only the start, and there is a long way to go to ensure that services are prepared for commissioning, and that the needs of smaller services are also addressed. These are vital processes, to ensure that the VCS can continue to make a valuable contribution to outcomes for children, young people and their families in Manchester.

Reminding ourselves of the values of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector in Manchester

It is often claimed that one of the distinguishing features of the voluntary, community and faith sector is that it is value driven. We started discussion groups by exploring which values are most meaningful to members of voluntary and community sector in their work. Statutory participants were asked to reflect on which values they felt best reflected VCFS partners they work with. The following values were identified to be the most meaningful (with the top three highlighted in red):



What are the Greatest Threats to Our Values?

Now more than ever there are pressures on the sector which have the potential to cause a change in what the sector does and how it does it. These pressures will be experienced very differently by organisations that are small and large, local and national, those that campaign and those that deliver services.

This following reflects what participants felt were the greatest blocks/challenges to living the values in our work (as discussed in the morning discussion groups).

1. Pace of Change

A big issue for the VCFS is the pace at which the environment in which we are working is changing. There appears to be a policy and legislation overload that makes it difficult for projects, especially smaller ones, to keep up to date. The result of not understanding and keeping up with the changing agenda could be drastic, with some organisations could disappearing altogether. It is increasingly evident that policy changes are not simply for managers, but also frontline workers and governing bodies need to be knowledgeable about the strategic agenda. The Common Assessment Framework was identified as a key development in this regard.

2. Developing a Partnership Approach

Participants felt that opportunities to develop a joined-up approach to service development are being missed, and that inter-agency governance structures reflect a lack of continuity or leadership. It is crucial that partnerships are developed between and within different sectors; partnerships built on the principles of respect and equality. It was felt that current partnerships reflect an inequitable balance of power between different sectors, exemplified by the 'paymaster' role of the City Council. There is recognition that partnership development is a challenging process that requires mutual understanding and an inclusive approach. Experience demonstrates that the local authority does not appreciate the complexity of the VCFS. To improve relationships across sectors it would be helpful if partnerships sought to identify shared values. It is important however that outcomes don't get lost in the process of relationship building.

3. Improving communication

A key factor that undermines the capacity of the VCFS is poor communication. The need to improve communication across and within sectors was identified is therefore essential. Equality of information and the distribution thereof by the City Council was considered vital to developing services and partnerships. In particular, a greater emphasis should be placed on actually talking to each other.

4. Developing good commissioning practices

Given that commissioning is the thread that passes through policy development in the City, there were a few concerns about how best to develop good commissioning practices. Most recent developments in the sector have been about being able to 'step outside of the box' and to think beyond boundaries, including geographical ones. There are fears that Commissioning will not recognise that many VCFS organisations don't fit neatly into district 'boxes', and that timescales will not be flexible enough to enable VCFS to tender, nor is there sufficient understanding of tendering within the sector. Commissioning processes

need to maintain a balance between quality and price in commissioning decisions, while funders and deliverers have to treat each other with equal values of fairness, transparency and honesty. Also, performance management needs to take on board existing frameworks, such as Supporting People and PMS, and ensure that soft outcomes are valued and incorporated into commissioning as legitimate evidence. Systems also need to capture diversity. Some concern was expressed as to where the VCFS fits with larger contracts.

5. Citywide vs local priorities

Many organisations perceive a real tension between city-wide and local priorities and have concerns that services meeting localised needs which sit outside of citywide priorities will not be protected. Accepting that there are competing local priorities by the local authority is important, and needs to be supported by making funding available for local issues.

City-wide target setting must not take away from groups being successful in responding to local need, and need to be given the opportunity to feed this into district needs analysis and the Children and Young People's Plan through a supported process.

6. Funding

Perhaps unsurprisingly key messages regarding funding were voiced by many participants throughout the day. In order to protect VCFS provision there is an urgent need to move to longer term sustainable funding streams. Organisations are no longer able to depend on public funding and it was felt that it is easier to access external funding which fits with organisational values than access statutory funding which can result in mission drift. Changes in eligibility of funding and priority issues affects the continuity of projects and has an impact particularly on smaller groups. Voluntary groups with no funding still have to pay the cost of conferences/networks and

7. Capacity Building

The ability of organisations to demonstrate outcomes/impact (what difference did it make?) as opposed to outputs was raised as an issue particularly for short term pieces of funding. Support around performance management is needed, however it is important to recognise that capacity building takes time – we need to go at organisation's pace. Leadership and management skills and full cost recovery were also specifically identified as a skills gap. It was recognised that the supporting infrastructure is not in place within organisations and we need to get better at sharing our skills and knowledge with other providers within a local community. It was suggested that common purpose training could be carried out to see where each organisation sits in relation to ethos and service delivery.

8. Loss of independence

Participants felt that it is becoming increasingly difficult for VCFS organisations to maintain their independence. The lobbying/campaigning role of providers is increasingly being recognised as difficult to get funded and needs to be promoted in a positive light. At the same time it was recognised that organisations need to get better as building up a body of evidence to show that what you're challenging is right – we certainly can't rely on anecdotal evidence. It was felt that the community activist/engagement role is being stifled within the current funding climate and it is becoming more difficult to be able to innovate. It was felt that it is really important that funders retain flexibility to enable innovation within the sector which is one of its greatest strengths.

What practical and positive things can we do to protect and enable the VCFS to thrive in Manchester?

Each discussion group was asked to agree clear action points they would like to be taken forward can be taken forward as an action plan in partnership between Children's Services and VCFS over the next year. The following eight areas of work identified were

<p>Continue to develop effective communication on all levels and proper consultation that really listens</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective communication at all levels, proper consultation that really listens (real and meaningful) - Good communication with VCFS - Ability to inform strategy - Communication – dissemination – email - Consultation/representation - We need to be involved in decisions from the beginning - Develop a structured process e.g. consultation/conference for both partners
<p>Enable effective representation and VCFS involvement in governance arrangements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good representation at key meetings - more VCFS involvement in governance – particularly defining needs and setting up commissioning arrangements - VCFS should be more challenging - Need to avoid duplication of meetings – governance arrangements not always clear
<p>Develop a longer term funding strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long term funding – 3 years – better quality of service - LA accept PM systems of certain funders as evidence of quality - Set up working party - VCS show value for money if M&E systems are consolidated
<p>Include target in the Local Area Agreement 'enable a thriving third sector'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target In LAA – thriving VCS - LAA – broaden out view of what invest to save is about and take long term view
<p>Increase training and development support to enable groups to respond to change - particularly for smaller groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training – marketing/selling - Support orgs in being more flexible to change and respond to changing needs - support in writing bids particularly for smaller groups - Larger organisations should support small groups in terms of setting systems up/accessing IT - Support for small grassroots orgs – development - Use vols from MMU or JCT for admin and research support - Job swapping across sectors/train together - Encouraging people – city council to go to projects

	and vice versa – managing by walking about
Promoting/understanding of VCFS within the Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can do attitude – positive partnerships – signposting - Promoting understanding of the work of the VCFS - Perceptions/training on VCFS - Education of stat sector around why they need to be in partnership with VCFS and vice versa - increasing awareness in LA - Ownership of compact within LA
Clear point of contact in the Local Authority for developing VCFS strategy and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for clear point of contact for VCFS for guidance whether big or small issue - Key person within LA – need to be clear on proxy measures which are being lobbied for - Set up actively involved dialogue involving VCS and Statutory sector - Funding – clarity and appropriate timescales
Developing a way of measuring the diversity/value of the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some way of measuring the diversity of the sector - Maintain the diversity of the sector - Clear exposition of values of VCFS - Develop a better picture of what investment VCFS brings into the city - Understand what other people are providing and who to refer to - Need for live and constantly updated service directory

Proposed Action Plan

Based on discussions in the morning and outcomes from the afternoon workshops, the following commitments have been identified as a way to address the key issues which were raised at the Growing Success conference:

1. Continue to develop effective communication on all levels and proper consultation that really listens

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children's Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain communication through Child & Family Support Forum (CFSF) and Voluntary Youth Manchester (VYM) e-bulletin, meetings, website, newsletter, policy briefings - Hold regular meetings and events for network members to come together - Inform VCFS about local and national policy changes that impact children, young people and families - Support involvement in local, regional and national consultations - Make links with BME and faith youth groups network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise awareness of the Compact with the new management teams at a district level - Ensure that local VCFS organisations are involved in any district level communication activities

2. Enable effective representation and VCFS involvement in governance arrangements

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children's Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and support the participation of VCFS members on strategic boards/groups and share learning - Have a Strategic Lead Role which sits on the Children's Board and other groups to feed in views, highlight issues and emerging themes that need addressing - Share best practice around strategic engagement with VCFS, highlight barriers and evaluate impact - Support representation on the district commissioning panels - Work to develop positive partnership relationships with Children's Services and Youth Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review the existing governance and partnership structure and make sure the VCFS is effectively engaged in the revised arrangements - During 2008/9 continue to resource the engagement of VCFS representatives on district panels

3. Develop a longer term funding strategy

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children's Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support development of VCFS commissioning plan, beginning in the first year with a planned transitional approach for funding for 09/10 - Work with commissioners to agree best practice for voluntary sector around procurement, contracting and full cost recovery - Support the development of a market development strategy for the VCFS - Identify and circulate alternative funding opportunities for organisations - Lobby for increased investment in infrastructure support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalise the short term improvement in contracting with the VCFS for 2008/09 - Continue to develop a commissioning framework that supports the added value the sector can bring

4. Include target in the Local Area Agreement 'enable a thriving third sector'

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children's Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the development of a baseline over 09/10 to enable inclusion of this target in the LAA for next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help to ensure the target is included in the LAA at the earliest opportunity

5. Increase training and development support to enable groups to respond to change - particularly for smaller groups

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children's Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the development of a capacity building programme for VCFS organisations delivering services for C, YP and families - Oversee the Workforce Strategic Partners Programme in collaboration with Manchester City Council - Identify major skills/training needs within the CYP & families VCS - Be part of the delivery of support around identified skills gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work alongside the sector and provide support when appropriate, maximising any opportunities for economies of scale from multi-agency working

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the coordination of a joint approach to capacity building for CYP&F VCS across agencies as part of a “third sector strategy” for Manchester. - To explore how large VCS organisations can act as a ‘hub’ to smaller community based groups - Explore the possibility of job swapping across sectors/train together 	
--	--

6. Promoting/understanding of VCFS within the Local Authority

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children’s Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enable communication between VCS and commissioners to improve understanding on both sides - Explore the opportunity for engaging with elected members and council officers in VCFS activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enable communication between VCS and commissioners to improve understanding on both sides - Explore the opportunity for engaging with elected members and council officers in VCFS activities

7. Clear point of contact in the Local Authority for developing VCFS strategy and guidance

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children’s Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liase with Graham Mellors (Strategy and Performance) to identify functions needed within Children’s Services to develop VCFS strategy and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liase with CFSS/VYM to identify functions needed within Children’s Services to develop VCFS strategy and guidance

8. Developing a way of measuring the diversity/value of the sector

<i>Child & Family Support Forum / Voluntary Youth Manchester</i>	<i>Children’s Services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop the MACC/VYM databases - Work with children’s services to build on the audit of organisations completed through the re-contracting process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider opportunities for maintaining and developing the audit

Next Steps....

Through the Child & Family Support Forum (CFSF) and Voluntary Youth Manchester (VYM) working in partnership with Children's Services we will revisit the action plan throughout the year and monitor progress against the key issues we have identified.

Kathy Brown has stepped down in her role as VCS Strategic Lead, and Ruth Craven from MACC is taking over this role from the beginning of June 2008. You can contact Ruth on 0161 834 9823 or email ruth@macc.org.uk for more information about this work.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Kathy for all her hard work supporting the strategic engagement of the children, young people and families over the last 9 months.

If you are not already, please do get in contact with the Child & Family Support Forum and Voluntary Youth Manchester and continue to feed in your views. The more voices we have the louder our voice can be heard! The following gives some information about the two voluntary and community sector bodies, while further details can be obtained via the contact details given.

Voluntary Youth Manchester

Voluntary Youth Manchester (VYM) was established in 2002 to facilitate and encourage the development and delivery of the best possible services for young people in Manchester.

Our main role is to support, promote and develop the local voluntary, community and faith youth sector, through a variety of means and mechanisms. These include:

- a regular e-mail bulletin addressing issues identified as important and valuable by the sector;
- a bi-monthly steering group meeting open to all VCFS groups working with young people;
- providing a consultative channel between relevant bodies such as the City Council and the voluntary youth sector;
- general advice and guidance on practice issues;
- being a voice for and from the sector in relevant forums in the City, such as in relation to Integrated Youth Support.

VYM is also managing the delivery of workforce development programme, with funding from the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC). The purpose of this is to establish a means of ensuring that staff and volunteers in services to young people, children and families across the voluntary, community and faith sector have the skills, experience, qualifications, training, etc to work to a consistent standard required to deliver quality services. Again this is being developed in partnership with the Child & Family Support Forum and Manchester City Council, to make sure that the best possible outcome is achieved.

If you would like further information about VYM please contact Ross Grant on 0161 832 0169 or at voluntaryyouthmanchester@gmail.com.

Child & Family Support Forum

The Child & Family Support Forum (CFSF) brings together voluntary and community sector organisations who work with and for children, young people and families in Manchester. The Forum works to strengthen the role of the sector as a provider of support and as a strategic partner in the city by:

- Recognising the needs of children and families in Manchester

- Developing understanding of the role of voluntary and community groups in improving the quality of life of children and families
- Highlighting the needs of a sustainable voluntary and community sector
- Improving access to services and choices for children and families
- Promoting the rights of children and families
- Recognising that the agendas of children, young people, parents, community groups and voluntary organisations are distinct though they often have much in common
- Support the involvement of groups in a range of decision making structures such as the Children's Board and Children and Young People's Partnership

We do this by...

- Sharing knowledge and information via email, newsletters, website, meetings and events
- Providing support and guidance on policy and strategy and highlighting issues and themes that need addressing
- Working to resolve issues of common concern
- Gathering evidence of the voluntary sector's contribution to improving outcomes for children, young people and families
- Linking into local planning structures

For more information on the Child & Family Support Forum and how to get involved go to our website at www.macc.org.uk or contact Ruth Craven on 0161 834 9823, or email: ruth@macc.org.uk