

**navca**  
local focus national voice



# Collaboration in practice

A collection of stories about good things  
that happen when we work together.

Provided by local infrastructure  
organisations throughout England.



# Foreword

Collaboration sits at the very core of local social action and the NAVCA membership. Across England NAVCA members are bringing people and organisations together to help support communities for good.

“Collaboration in Practice” is about the good things that can happen when we work together, and highlights just some of the amazing work happening within the NAVCA membership every single day.

NAVCA believes that by working together great things are possible. So we are committed to working with partners for the benefit of people, communities and the whole of civil society. If you are an organisation, public, private or charity, that also believes we can only overcome the biggest societal challenges by working together, then please get in touch with us here at NAVCA.

We are very thankful to our members for working with us on this and to **MissionBox.com** for supporting the production of this publication.

## Tom Watson

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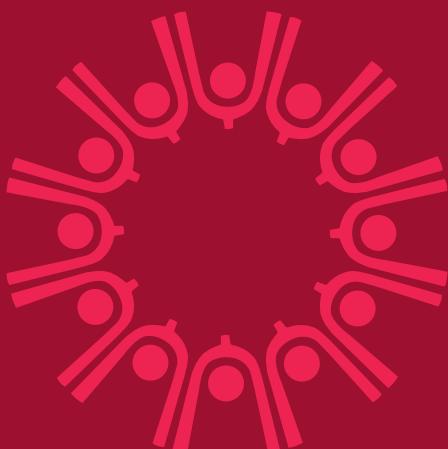
## More about our sponsor

Engaged donors, valued staff and committed volunteers are vital to a charities success. But how do you ensure they feel involved and appreciated? Only 47% of first-time major donors are retained after one-year and around 50% of volunteers/board members report that charities do not keep them engaged.

Reaching supporters and partners is also vital for any charity, and yet research suggests that non-profit emails have a 34% open rate and only a 4.99% click through-rate. How do you ensure you reach and engage people effectively?

MissionBox.com Communities is a one-stop engagement solution for charities. It offers a secure place for volunteers, donors, trustees and staff to learn about your work, impact and events as well as providing easy-to-search document storage and retrieval. **MissionBox is affordable for small local charities and is also GDPR compliant.**

You can learn more by reading [The Eight Reasons Your Current Nonprofit's Engagement Strategies Fail](#) and watching our [Engagement Communities video](#). You can also contact [pam@missionbox.co.uk](mailto:pam@missionbox.co.uk) for a free online demo.



# Strong foundations for successful collaboration



**ACTION**  
with communities  
in cumbria

Cumbria CVS has taken a long-term approach to nurturing a culture of collaboration amongst the third sector and its public and statutory counterparts. This has paid off, and when Cumbria has needed to pull together, the foundations were already laid.

Cumbria CVS coordinates Cumbria's Third Sector Network - a 'network of networks' that has

existed for more than 10 years. It consists of 17 specialist networks with areas of focus ranging from transport and the environment, to health and wellbeing. The network provides coordinated leadership for more than 500 VCSE organisations and a mechanism for involving them in planning.

In practice, this ranges from sharing news and information, through to hosting consultation events of general interest to the third sector. At the centre of

the network, the Cumbria Third Sector Executive - made up of a representative from each of the 17 specialist networks - acts as a 'voice' for Cumbria's third sector. The Executive facilitates engagement with statutory organisations and national government, providing representation at local and county level. Cumbria County Council has supported this infrastructure, part-funding the network for a number of years.

Never was a collaborative approach needed more so than in the wake of Storm Desmond in 2015, when devastating floods hit parts of Cumbria. Cumbria CVS was very heavily involved in the strategic recovery structures; the Third Sector Network provided a crucial communication mechanism to reach those communities affected, and to involve VCSE organisations in the Local Recovery Groups.

Engagement Team Manager at Cumbria CVS, Carolyn Otley believes that in the early stages of disaster recovery, the need for communication with trusted sources is vital. She explains,

**"Early recovery from Storm Desmond was a very tense time. The network meant that VCSE organisations had access to reliable information and were able to cascade that on to the communities and individuals they worked with."**

# Strong foundations for successful collaboration



Cumbria CVS is now leading on a Big Lottery funded project 'Rebuilding Together', which builds on its experiences in 2015 to build community resilience. One aspect of this work is to tackle the need to strengthen links between the local community and statutory sector responders. Public sector partners within the project have been keen to collaborate with community organisations at a strategic level. In November last year, ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (another of the Rebuilding Together project partners) collaborated with the emergency services to host a 'Community to COBR' conference. It has also successfully applied for additional funding from Cumbria Community Foundation to employ a member of staff to work with Cumbria Local Resilience Forum, demonstrating the value of Cumbria CVS' work in this area.

Chief Superintendent Andy Towler from Cumbria Police explains,

**"The collaborative work being undertaken by voluntary and statutory agencies in Cumbria will make us more resilient in dealing with threats such as Storm Desmond and ensure that we keep people and their communities safe from harm."**

Carolyn comments,

"A couple of years ago, we suddenly felt like we were making progress with the network. A huge part of that is around having good relationships in place. This includes the third sector organisations - so they trust us to speak on their behalf at times - and with statutory sector staff at all levels, and local politicians.

"It takes time, but the results we are seeing now in terms of community recovery to incidents and the opportunities opening up are beyond what we could have anticipated."



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**Carolyn Otley**  
Engagement Team Manager,  
Cumbria CVS

# Building resilient communities



**Wellbeing Erewash**  
*Your Life Your Way*

People are looking after each other in Erewash. It is this principle that Wellbeing Erewash, a transformative health and wellbeing project, is built on. And, with a little help from its local infrastructure body, a principle that is delivering results.

Coordinated by the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other health organisations, Wellbeing Erewash is one of several vanguard projects, in selected Multi-specialty Community Providers (MCPs) throughout the country. Described by Professor Don Berwick - the founding



Chief Executive of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement - as "amazing", Wellbeing Erewash is spearheading new care models, working towards a system where people support themselves and take responsibility for their own care, with access to a community support service.

Erewash Voluntary Action is integral to this mission. It has worked in partnership with the CCG and other local health services to design and deliver a Community Resilience strategy. This includes a Development Workers Network, which gives individuals from voluntary and

# Building resilient communities

statutory partners supporting clients in the area opportunities to share skills, information, good practice and resources, as well as learning about services on offer.

The Voluntary Sector Forum was established to connect people and groups, all working with similar aims. The forum is based at Erewash Voluntary Action and is a chance to discuss issues of common concern, gain mutual support and take collective action. It campaigns and raises the profile of the community and voluntary sector's work and helps facilitate cross-sector partnership working.

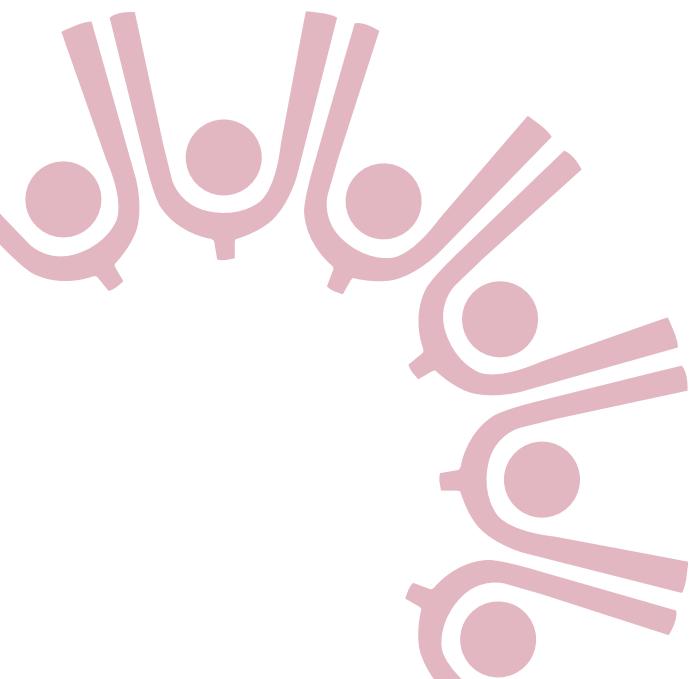
Voluntary Action Erewash also hosts the Quality for Health (QfH) programme. Developed by Calderdale CVS, it is the only quality assurance system in the country designed to support the VCSE sector to demonstrate the outcomes of local health

services. So far, 10 organisations have taken part in the programme as part of Wellbeing Erewash.

Erewash Voluntary Action also hosts a Community Connectors development worker to work with local citizens to spread the word about activities in the area.

The partnership working with Erewash Voluntary Action has elevated the impact and results of Wellbeing Erewash. Stella Scott, Erewash Voluntary Action Chief Executive says,

**"This is one of the few times in all my years working in CVS that I can say we are true partners. Our work is now starting to influence the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership for Derbyshire and I can see the impact these initiatives are having in Erewash. Together, we are building resilient communities, which are intrinsically linked to resilient, healthy and happy individuals."**



# A specific brief, with big potential



Spread across three districts with many members in remote rural areas, Cambridge CVS' training courses do not reach as far and wide as they could. The resources are there, including a series of introductory courses for trustees and a series of detailed modules on subjects such as employing people and fundraising. The issue is the lack of time that charity staff and volunteers can realistically dedicate to travelling to and attending training.

Making these valuable resources more accessible through the use of digital platforms, is a challenge that Chief Executive Mark Freeman was happy to explore when Cambridge Hub approached him about the Social Innovation Programme, a student volunteering scheme.

Cambridge CVS has worked with the Hub – Cambridge University's volunteering network - for several years, advertising volunteering placements to its network of charities and delivering an annual volunteering fair. The nature of the Social Innovation Programme offers undergraduate consultancy services to local charities over a six-week period. Mark

immediately saw the value this would bring to Cambridge CVS. He explains:

**"We have five exceptionally bright individuals helping to improve our digital offering. Crucially, the students are all digital natives, so their understanding of new technologies is outstanding. The perspective they bring is entirely different to that of anyone else I would work with."**

Although the work is delivered over a short timescale, Cambridge CVS has received a professional service. The undergraduates surveyed members and carried out an internal audit of the CVS, including resources, skills and systems. They analysed their findings and delivered a report which set out a series of recommendations. The project has demanded an investment of time from Mark, which he is comfortable with given its potential. He comments:

"Digital is so important, and Cambridge CVS is a very

small organisation without the resources internally to get us where I would like us to be. We now have some very solid evidence-based recommendations that have the potential to influence our strategy, so it's right that I am involved. I hope that from here we can build on this work with the Hub to put some of the recommendations in place and to extend the reach of our training."

Mark is developing relationships with the business schools of Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin University, recognising the value and mutual benefit that further collaborations can bring.

"Universities present great opportunities, not just in the work that they do but the people that are there: staff and students make fantastic volunteers and trustees. It is difficult for small charities to access such large institutions. Sometimes you have to know the right person to start a conversation. Our role is to tap into these resources for our members and the communities they serve."



# A natural partnership

Volunteer Cornwall has nurtured a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with the University of Exeter's Social Innovation Group. Over the past decade, they have stuck to some simple principles: trust, shared objectives and an understanding of the local context in which they work.

A mutual aspiration to enable innovation in Cornwall's voluntary sector has resulted in

many successful collaborations. Volunteer Cornwall and the Social Innovation Group delivered the first ever Knowledge Transfer Partnership to have a social outcome; improved guidance for voluntary groups. With other partners, including Age UK and the local authority, they collaborated on 'Living Well', a set of guiding principles that led to a series of partnership programmes. Living Well saved the NHS £38 million in costs associated with non-elective hospital admissions. This work has progressed to involvement in the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP).

Current collaborations include 'Smartline', with Coastline Housing as another partner. This research-based project explores the role of technology and social capital in supporting vulnerable people in one of the country's most deprived areas. The collaboration seeks to establish how technology and apps can be adopted by housing associations for use in their tenants' homes. Volunteer Cornwall is focussing on what social capital exists around those tenants and how they can be given more support in their communities.

The academic papers delivered from this work will provide housing associations throughout the country real life, evidence-backed recommendations, strengthening their offer to tenants.



The organisations are also collaborating on Living Well to Work, a project to help vulnerable people take control of their lives, through reengagement with their community. Volunteer Cornwall delivers hands-on support through their outreach workers. The Social Innovation Group has a full-time researcher who works closely with the outreach team to



# A natural partnership

assess the impact and outcomes of the work. For Ian Jones, Chief Executive of Volunteer Cornwall, this close contact is the essence of the collaboration. He comments:

“There are generic tools available to our sector to measure ‘impact’, but how effective can these really be in such a localised context? Working with a local research partner who really sees what is happening and changing, means that their analysis and resulting evidence is localised and relevant. It is meaningful.”

Professor Catherine Leyshon from the Social Innovation Group echoes this:

“We are interested in doing research that makes a difference. The close working relationship between Volunteer Cornwall and the Social Innovation Group has allowed our academics to undertake

their research in real-world situations. They achieve impact by communicating their findings to the organisations with whom they work.”

The mutual benefit is key. However, this is something that Ian believes is missed by many charities, sometimes resulting in a lack of appetite for collaborative working. He explains:

“The competitive nature of tendering can really stifle collaboration; once money is involved, people stop wanting to work together. I sometimes struggle to engage other charities

in collaborative work when the incentive is long term gain, rather than much needed funding for day-to-day delivery. I understand it, but it is a shame. As our work with the Social Innovation Group has shown, collaboration helps us to meet our charitable objectives, in a much better way than working alone.”

**“We are interested in doing research that makes a difference. The close working relationship between Volunteer Cornwall and the Social Innovation Group has allowed our academics to undertake their research in real-world situations.”**

**Professor Catherine Leyshon  
Social Innovation Group**

# Stronger together



**“This is a great example of many different organisations coming together and pooling funding in order to support activities that simply would not otherwise happen due to diminishing resources”**

Councillor Frank Hont, Cabinet Member for Housing

The needs of families are growing. As central and local government funding has decreased, the use of foodbanks has increased, and many children are losing opportunities to develop through play. In a city feeling the effects more than most, Liverpool CVS (LCVS) has acted to make sure that children and families can benefit from the many voluntary and community groups, public sector services and private funding streams that exist.

LCVS is leading ‘Positive About Play’ in partnership with Merseyside Play Action Council,

the United Way in Liverpool - which collaborates with Liverpool City Council, Public Health and Liverpool CCG - and a wide range of voluntary and community sector partners. The programme delivers vital out of school provision for children in safe, group environments. There are 70 voluntary, community and public organisations involved in the programme, which provides support to more than 2,500 children every day during school holidays.

Funding comes from the pooled resources of those involved, recognising that a bigger impact can be made together than alone. The partnership has also teamed up with national charities to offer extra support to children and their families. This includes ‘Play healthy’, providing breakfasts and lunches to children through a collaboration with Fareshare, and ‘Simply Advice’, offering parents and carers assistance with social and welfare issues, delivered by Citizens Advice.

# Stronger together

Colin Heaney, Director of Development and Programmes at LCVS, says:

"Thousands of children in Liverpool live in the most deprived areas nationally and could be missing out on the chance to play in a safe and supportive environment. Positive About Play pulls together a wide variety of facilities, volunteers and funds that can make sure they do not miss out. Over the past year, we've reached 22,000 children and their families through the programme."

Speaking of the city-wide programme, Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Frank Hont, comments: "This is a great example of many different organisations coming together and pooling funding in order to support activities that simply would not otherwise happen due to diminishing resources.

"The play schemes are providing a bond which is connecting our communities together, particularly in areas where people are reliant on each other for support."

**“Over the past year, we've reached 22,000 children and their families through the programme”**

**Colin Heaney**

Director of Development and Programmes, LCVS





# Business matters



Strong communities need thriving third sector organisations. But wouldn't communities flourish if private and charitable sectors worked better together? That's the ethos behind Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action's (Warwickshire CAVA) speed-matching events, giving businesses and charities an opportunity to meet and work together to strengthen their relationships and communities.

Warwickshire CAVA established a relationship with Midcounties Co-operative when the organisation approached WCAVA to assist with their Corporate Social Responsibility. The Co-operative had the staff, the skills and a remit to give something back to their community. WCAVA had the contacts of hundreds of charities across the County. To bring it all together, WCAVA organised a 'speed-matching' event, where the Co-operative's employees and the charities met, to find a suitable 'match'.

This inaugural event was a great success and many charities across Warwickshire benefitted from skilled volunteers helping in areas such as HR, finance and data entry. The Co-operative was impressed and excited by the doors this event had opened for its employees.

**“We want to show our members how valuable relationships with businesses are, and vice versa, through success stories.”**

**Paul Tolley**  
Chief Executive, WCAVA

# Business matters

Word spread of the collaborative work between WCAVA and The Co-operative. In its second year, the event was attended by employees of 10 other private sector companies from across the region including Calor, Santander and Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC). Needless to say, WCAVA and Mid Counties Co-operative are already working on how to build upon these relationships even further.

WCAVA Chief Executive, Paul Tolley, believes the strength of this collaboration lies in good communication and a bold approach to sharing success. He explains:

**“We have a strong relationship with Midcounties Co-operative, managed by our Director of Volunteering, Kate Morrison. Kate can really focus on nurturing this relationship which is important, and she keeps up regular and open communication with them. We aim to be bold in publicising our work with private sector companies. We want to show our members how valuable relationships with businesses are, and vice versa, through success stories.”**

One such success story came as a direct result of the last speed-matching event, where a WCAVA member described how she had “three big problems solved through that one single event”. This illustrates how effective and efficient events like these can be. WCAVA members benefitted in a number of ways, from getting free I.T. audits, to skilled Trustees and corporate fundraising.

Paul has developed WCAVA’s links with local businesses further by creating a Back Office Support Services (BOSS) supplier register for its members, covering a range of back office services. All suppliers on the database share an understanding of the sector and the demands faced by charities, and all offer discounted rates to Warwickshire CAVA’s members. Paul comments,

“Building long-term relationships between the private sector and local charities is a priority because both can help each other. Ultimately, these links strengthen the community, which is exactly what we are here to do.”



# Keeping it local



**Halton & St Helens**  
Voluntary and Community Action



With funding streams decreasing and accessing grants becoming more difficult, Halton and St Helens VCA (HSHVCA) wanted to secure a different source of income for its local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

Recognising that a philanthropic culture existed amongst many small local businesses, HSHVCA considered whether a solution could be found to maximise the benefit of this, whilst also addressing the need for funding.

One such solution came in part due to HSHVCA's good relationship with Halton Chamber of Commerce, whose Chief Executive at the time was keen to inject more structure into the Corporate Social Responsibility activities of local businesses.

Together, the two organisations had a shared ambition to create more structured routes between businesses and charities, as well as creating a new funding solution. They established a steering group which included representatives from the local Community Foundations and BITC Connectors, and worked together to identify local dormant assets. The group subsequently

successfully lobbied for the release of these assets to invest back into the local community.

Combining a number of dormant trusts with a fund Halton Chamber wished to contribute, the steering group established the Halton Foundation. The foundation offers financial grants

ambitions. Securing the fund was a main objective of the Foundation and I am delighted that we have been able to do this."

There have been lessons learnt along the way and as the progress in connecting charities and business through the Foundation

slows, reviewing and reassessing how collaborations are working is vital. Sally explains:

"We had a particularly good relationship with members of the steering group, some of which have now moved on and are no longer involved. As a result, enthusiasm for the work can decrease and you find yourself having to convince and 'win over' new partners, which changes the dynamic of a collaboration. Also, we too have lost resource at HSHVCA which means the time I can invest has decreased.

"Ultimately, the ground work has been laid and local charities and groups are benefitting. The partnership now needs to use this success as impetus to pick up where we left off and continue."

**"We have been able to find local solutions to address local funding needs"**

**Sally Yeoman**  
Chief Executive, HSHCVA

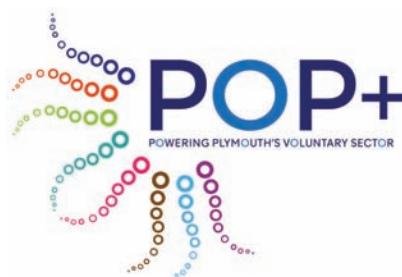
to small local voluntary and community groups. With partners of the foundation including the Chamber of Commerce, HSHVCA, Halton Borough Council and the Community Foundations for Lancashire and Merseyside, it also offers in-kind support to charities through business matching services.

Sally Yeoman, Chief Executive of HSHCVA led on this project and comments,

"We have been able to find local solutions to address local funding needs, through working with those organisations around us that have similar goals and



# On the crest of a wave



Sometimes, great collaborations ‘just happen’. It starts with an idea, a conversation and lots of hard work, but do we always stop to look at what has been achieved? This is what inspired Plymouth Octopus Project’s (POP+) recent conference, The Crest of the Wave, designed to celebrate the great things happening in Plymouth through partnerships and a ‘just do it’ attitude.

The event was attended by 175 energetic and enthusiastic delegates from public, private and third sector organisations. A showcase

of partnerships and projects included a small community organisation that began with a street party and is now a collaboration of 47 partners renovating buildings for community use.

Delegates and speakers explored the potential of Plymouth becoming a Compassionate City and a Sustainable City – both initiatives having cross-sector collaboration at their heart.

Another highlight of the event was the launch of a new collaboration, ‘Our Plymouth’ an online single point of access to find out about volunteering opportunities in the city. POP+ has teamed up with the City Council and local newspaper, the Plymouth Herald to deliver the project, which secured private sector funding. Our Plymouth is designed to help facilitate active citizenship, showing that everyone can help to improve their local area and their city.

A new source of funding available to Plymouth’s voluntary and community groups through POP+

# On the crest of a wave

was also announced at the event. The place-based funding awarded to POP+ by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation is available to support collaborative projects that break down barriers and support positive change.

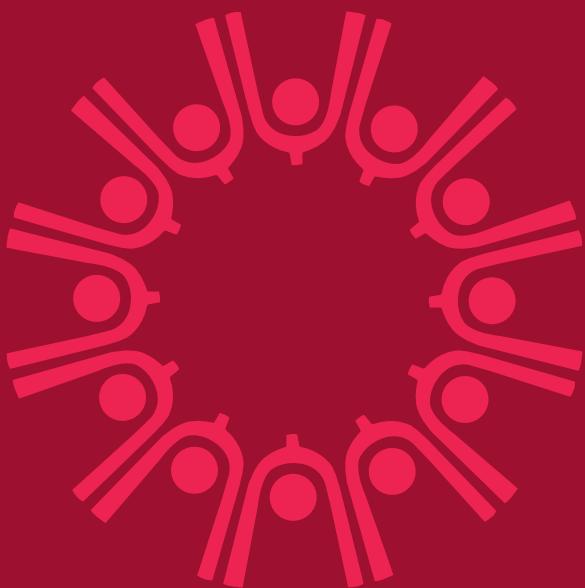
Jacky Clift, Chief Executive of POP+, says:

"Our celebratory conference was delivered in the context of our city being on the crest of a wave. Plymouth is attracting attention and crucially, funding. We want to showcase what can and has been achieved through partnerships to show individuals, charities, businesses and funders what more can be done by working together for the city."

**"Plymouth is attracting attention and crucially, funding. We want to showcase what can and has been achieved through partnerships to show individuals, charities, businesses and funders what more can be done by working together for the city"**

**Jacky Clift Chief Executive, POP+**





**Thank you to our members  
featured in this book for  
sharing their stories of  
collaboration.**

NAVCA is the national membership charity for local voluntary sector infrastructure - the people who help others set up and run charities and community groups.

To find out more about local infrastructure and the vital role NAVCA's members play in society, take a look at our website: [www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk) and follow us on Twitter for regular updates: **@NAVCA**.