



Case Study

Stockport's VCFSE Work and Skills Fund



The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord sets out a shared commitment between the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector and public sector partners to strengthen collaboration to help deliver better outcomes for communities. Stockport are delivering fantastic work to improve outcomes for residents, working together with VCFSE organisations and public services.

Background & Context

The Stockport VCFSE Work and Skills Fund is part of the Greater Manchester Economic Inactivity Trailblazer Programme, funded by the UK Government. The pioneering initiative was created in partnership with Stockport's local infrastructure organisations, Sector 3, and the local Council's Economy, Work & Skills Team to **tackle systemic employment inequalities**, whilst **building a more sustainable cross-sector partnership**.

Six VCFSE organisation were awarded a share of £100,000 to support Stockport residents facing barriers to employment. Stockport has significant levels of economic inactivity*, particularly among residents facing multiple and complex barriers to employment, including caring responsibilities, disability, poor mental health, and long-term disengagement from statutory services. There was a clear need for more flexible, community-based and inclusive approaches for people, who experience barriers in accessing traditional employment support.

**The Office for National Statistics define economic inactivity as: people of working age who are not in employment, have not been seeking work within the last four weeks, and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks*

A Cross-Sector Relationship

The strength of the existing relationship between Sector 3 and Stockport Council, as well as Sector 3's track record of managing grant funds were key enablers for the commissioning of this work. Sector 3 were commissioned to both manage the grant funding process and to provide hands-on development and relationship building support to the funded cohort; to build capacity and ensure this work was connected to the wider employment support system.

'The Stockport model shows what is achievable: sustained, values-led, relationship-based engagement infrastructure connected to but not dependent on any single programme.'

'What made it effective was not the programme funding but the sustained investment in relationship-building over time, the values-led approach that prioritised trust before transaction, and a funded lead role with time to maintain the connections.'

'A Greater Manchester Local Infrastructure Report: Economic Inactivity Trailblazer VCFSE Support Project', VSNW

Key Activities

- Designing an accessible commissioning process for VCFSE organisations, including a "meet the funder" session and a practical bid-writing workshop, whilst maintaining strict separation between support and funding decisions to ensure transparency and impartiality. This also included convening an independent funding panel that included Sector 3, the funder, an independent member, and someone with lived experience from the local area.
- Providing monthly development sessions for funded organisations; bringing together VCFSE providers, the Work and Skills team, and Council-employed navigators to share learning, monitor progress and problem-solve collectively.



- Actively brokering relationships and connections between VCFSE organisations and between different parts of the system.
- Embedding lived experience throughout the programme, both in decision-making and delivery. Staff members working on the project also brought lived experience, both as Stockport residents and of pathways back into work.

Outcomes

- This funding has now been extended for another year, furthering the impact across Stockport.
- Six transformative projects were delivered with a community-led approach by local VCFSE organisations.
- Stronger, higher-quality funding applications and fewer organisations dropping out of the application process. Sector 3's were able to actively encourage and support VCFSE organisations to experiment and test out new approaches through this work.
- Monthly development sessions created a strong learning community, allowing organisations to share challenges and solutions, whilst also supporting data collection and reporting.
- Collaboration between VCFSE providers, Council teams and Work and Skills Navigators increased, with community-led activity becoming more visible to people in different parts of the system.

The enhanced support offered by Sector 3 ensured that opportunities for collaboration between VCFSE organisations and across sectors were identified and facilitated, and that unanticipated outcomes and stories of change from the work were made visible. The work has strengthened credibility with commissioners, demonstrated the value of commissioning for learning and experimentation, and established a replicable funding model, and cross-sector approach, delivered in the spirit of the GM VCFSE Accord.

[Discover how the Stockport's Work & Skills Fund is making a difference to residents and find out more about its grant recipients on Sector 3's website.](#)