

# Developing impactful and sustainable anchor partnerships with the voluntary sector

## Context:

On 25th October the [Health Anchors Learning Network](https://www.haln.org.uk) hosted an online event ‘[Partnership in Practice: Health Anchors and the civic and VCSE \(voluntary, community and social enterprise\) sector](#)’ to inspire and support colleagues taking an anchor approach to health to develop impactful and sustainable cross-sector partnerships.

Partnerships are central to anchor impact and recent ICS (Integrated Care System) policy explicitly encourages local partnership and collaboration. Partnering with the civic and voluntary sector is also a topic which frequently emerges in HALN’s [Action Learning Set](#) discussions because navigating complexity of partnerships is experienced a common challenge, especially taking into account emerging and varied ICS structures.

This document summarises key insights, questions, quotes and examples directly from event speakers and participants.

## Impact

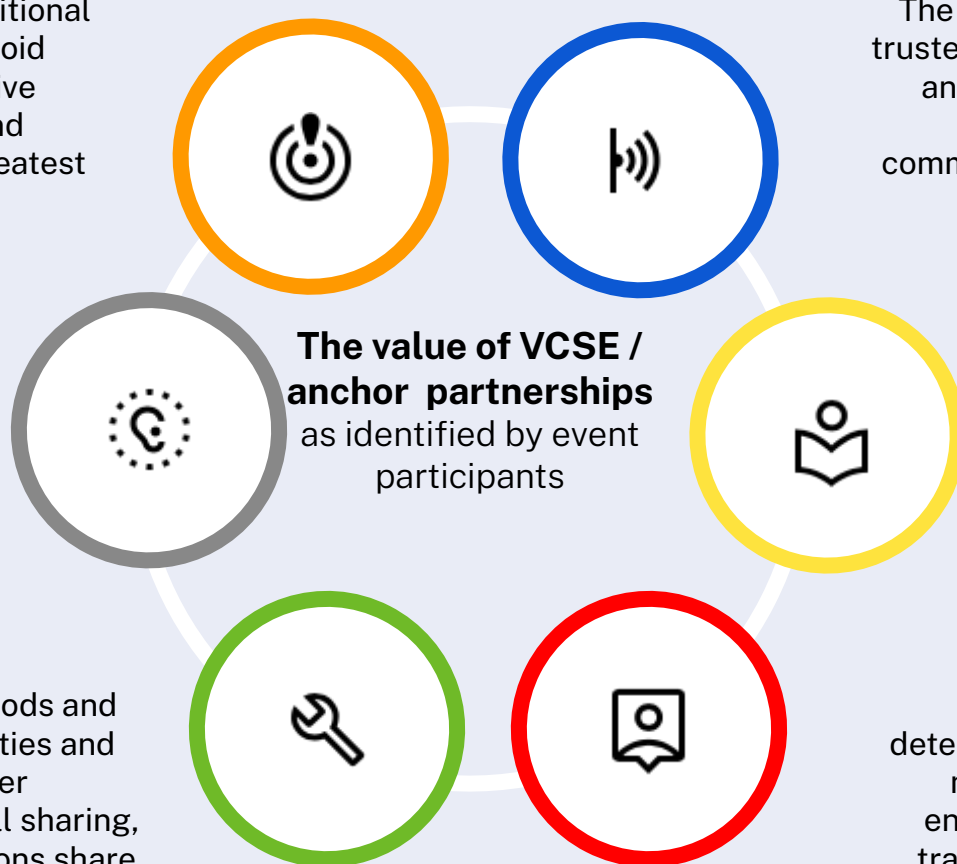
Working in partnership - across traditional boundaries and sectors - helps to avoid duplication and streamlines collective effort to make best use of assets and resources, helping to ensure the greatest impact: “we are better together.”

## Diversity & Engagement

Working across sectors increases diversity of perspectives, creating richer insights and potentially bringing in more staff and volunteers which increases overall capacity.

## Upskilling

Partners have different skills, methods and approaches for engaging communities and delivering support - working together stimulates mutual learning and skill sharing, for instance when VCSE organisations share knowledge around trauma-informed practice.



## Reach

The VCSE and statutory sector are often trusted voices and are well placed to offer an agile response to local need. VCSEs have established relationships with communities and may be able to offer outreach support.

## Knowledge

“Everyone doesn’t know everything, so knowledge sharing is vital.” The VCSE sector have deep community insight which can and should inform anchor decision making.

## Prevention Focus

When it comes to tackling social determinants of health, anchors can have more impact by considering points of engagement with communities beyond traditional healthcare, through working with VCSE partners.

### Case Study: [Generation Medics](#)

Generation Medics is an award-winning social enterprise that works with local communities to co-develop solutions to support people from all backgrounds (particularly people living in high areas of deprivation) to explore, strive towards and succeed in health, social care and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) careers. They are reducing health inequalities and improving social mobility through empowering local communities.

The partnership between Generation Medics and local anchor institutions means that the initiative can: deliver on strategic priorities faster with deeper impact leveraging existing community assets; put the individual rather than the NHS at the centre to overcome barriers to health equity; positively impact on the local community beyond the doors of the hospital.

### Case Study: [Flourishing Communities](#)

Flourishing Communities started as 6-month pilot project aimed at understanding barriers to primary health care faced by Somali women in Tower Hamlets, and has now been funded for a further three years.

It is a partnership between Tower Hamlets CVS (Council for Voluntary Services), Women’s Inclusive Team (WIT), GP Care Group, Queen Mary’s University and women from the Somali community who supported the pilot phase.

WIT have built deep trust with the community and local providers and are experts in community languages. As such, they are able to gather honest and unique insights from the community.

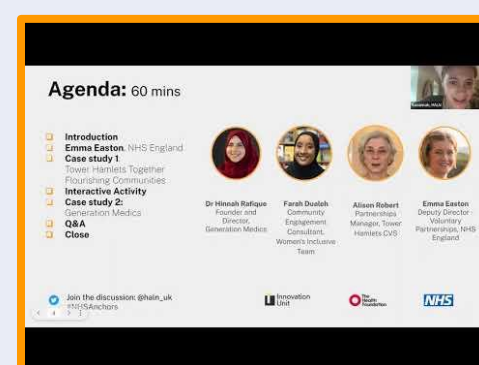
The programme has led to: increased trust in the system; improved health seeking for Somali women; two women working toward and interpreter qualification so they can be part of the solution; a recruitment of Inclusion Officer by Tower Hamlets Primary Care Group; and Somali speakers employed as local frontline staff.

During the *Partnership in Practice* webinar, attended by professionals from a range of VCSE and statutory organisations, HALN ask participants embarking on cross-sector partnerships: **What would you like a prospective partner to know?**

Voluntary sector participants shared the perpetual challenge of funding limits, which means they can move at a different pace than statutory partners - this does not mean they are not the right partners for certain programmes, or that it is not worth the time. However, they may need more support. As one participant said, “**pace doesn’t always reflect passion**”. VCSE participants said they wanted partners to know that “**partnership must be two-way: give and take**”.

NHS providers and system colleagues expressed a strong desire to work collaboratively as equals alongside VCSE partners. Some said that they need support in spreading the word to colleagues on the benefits of partnership working and resource sharing.

Colleagues cross-sector agreed that: there can be **power imbalances** which need to be addressed; this work takes long-term **time and resource investment**; and, that **small steps** and **early engagement** make a big difference. For more, watch full webinar via the clickable video link (right).



## Recent and relevant resources:

### To read



- [‘Mooring Alongside: Anchors in partnership’ blog](#) with an illustration with four tips
- [How do you design a structure for partnering across the NHS, local authorities and community groups?](#), Innovation Unit
- [Trust Takes Time: lessons for VCSE organisations partnering with the NHS](#), Innovation Unit
- [Realising the Value](#): Ten key actions to put people and communities at the heart of health and wellbeing, The Health Foundation
- NHS Confederation, [How health and care systems can work better with VCSE partners](#)

### To Watch



- [Partnership in Practice](#): health anchors and the civic and voluntary sector
- Lunch and Learn on Anchor Institutions [recording](#)
- HACT & HALN: [What can NHS anchors learn from Housing Associations on Economic Development?](#)
- HACT & HALN: [What can NHS anchors learn from Housing Associations on Community Development?](#)
- HACT & HALN: [What can NHS anchors learn from Housing Associations on social value?](#)
- Supply Change and HALN: [What anchor institutions can do to involve social enterprises in supply chains?](#)
- Innovation Unit, The National Lottery Community Fund, The King’s Fund and IVAR: [Why and how ICSs should partner with the voluntary sector to tackle health inequalities](#)
- Innovation Unit, The National Lottery Community Fund, The King’s Fund and IVAR: [Opportunities Ahead: Health Anchors and the VCSE Sector](#)

### To use



- [A guide aimed at ICS on how to partner more effectively with the VCSE sector](#). The guide includes all those who work within a system, including NHS Trusts.
- [NAVCA](#), to find your local infrastructure organisations providing support to small charities and community groups
- Innovation Unit and The National Lottery Community Fund [Health Equality Storybook, focusing on 14 cross-sector VCSE-led partnerships](#)
- Innovation Unit’s [Features of Successful Partnerships printable activity](#)
- The King’s Fund: [A reflective learning framework for partnering: insights from the early work of the Healthy Communities Together partnerships](#)
- [Shape Atlas](#), a platform many organisations are using to identify unoccupied space, for instance to offer this for voluntary sector use.