

Prevention services provided by Voluntary Community Organisations (VCOs)**Carers Together – A brief overview**

Valuing Carers 2015 – the rising value of carers' support is a research paper that looks at the value to the UK economy of the support provided by unpaid carers. The report contains data in respect of Middlesbrough. In 2015, Middlesbrough was reported to have 14,561 carers and the economic value of the contribution made by these carers was 328 million.

Carers Together provides an outreach, assessment and support service for people aged 18+ who are providing unpaid care for a family member, relative or friend who has:

- A disability.
- An illness or health condition.
- A mental health problem.
- Age-related difficulties.
- An alcohol or drug problem.

The VCO is commissioned by Middlesbrough Council and is based in St Mary's Centre. Since October 2015, the VCO has supported 206 carers. Furthermore, since 2003, the VCO has also been providing carers services in Redcar and Cleveland. Over 6000 carers are registered with the organisation and direct support is provided to over 2000 carers per year.

Carers can access the VCO face-to-face, by phone, email or text from 9am-5pm Monday to Friday. Outside of these times, carers can also access the VCO by appointment.

The VCO offers a range of free services for carers, including information, advice, guidance and support; a counselling service; a welfare rights service; legal clinics; carers support groups; training; activities; newsletters and events. Staff listen to carers' experiences, help them to identify their needs and work with them to find solutions.

Since October 2015, the VCO has completed assessments and support plans with 108 carers in Middlesbrough, who all have needs in respect of their health and wellbeing. The assessment focuses on promoting wellbeing and intervening early and therefore can prevent, mitigate or delay the need for costly interventions, for both the carer and the person they care for. The assessment also identifies carers who are at risk of not being able or willing to continue to provide care and creates a support plan to prevent this wherever possible. As a result, carers have reported positive outcomes, including feeling more informed, supported and listened to as well as less stressed and less isolated.

In the majority of cases, carers' needs are being met by the services provided by Carers Together and by a range of other voluntary sector organisations, at no cost to health and social care.

If carers are supported as early as possible in their caring journey to remain emotionally and physically well, financially secure and included in their communities, then more people will be able to remain living independently in their own homes for longer.

Carers Together currently employs 3 members of staff and if demand for the service increases, it will have an impact on waiting times and the quality of the service provided.

Hope North East – A brief overview

Hope North East is a peer-led organisation providing support, housing, volunteering and employment for those recovering from addiction. The VCO was established in 2008 as a mid-point allegiance between the recovery community and commissioned services. 50% of employees are in recovery from addiction themselves. The VCO is currently located on Marton Road and is part of Middlesbrough Recovering Together, which provides outreach and community-based work and is supported by the Thirteen group. The VCO supports 300 people per year.

The VCO recruited and trained 50 volunteers in 2015, which included providing placements for students from Teesside University and Durham University. The VCO's volunteers are crucial in providing a valuable service that's effective and efficient.

The people who approach the VCO for assistance present with a range of issues that include debt, homelessness, isolation, past or present offending, mental health issues, poor physical health, social isolation, family breakdown, low self-esteem and unemployment

The fundamental aim of the VCO is to support those in recovery from addiction to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. The VCO exists to inspire, motivate, empower and support all those affected by substance misuse, to sustain long-term recovery and lasting positive change. As a peer-led organisation, the VCO is committed to providing employment and volunteering opportunities for the recovery community.

The people that the VCO supports have often been marginalised and stigmatised by society and not connected with their local communities. The VCO raises the profile of recovery locally in order to increase awareness that people can and do recover. Individuals and families often suffer in silence due to the shame of admitting they are experiencing addiction related harm.

The VCO supports people to find work and increase their employability skills. In 2015, 105 were supported to gain sustainable work. Locally, the VCO has good relationships with employers and has negotiated work placements in a number of large businesses.

There are 6 supported self-contained flats within the VCO's premises, and referrals are received from a range of different routes ranging from self-referrals to prison release. The VCO provides 6 months supported accommodation and support to move into the private rented sector or social housing. This involves working with a range of landlords. The VCO also provides a bond scheme.

The VCO recently received a grant through Job Centre Plus and are currently undertaking projects in Hemlington and Beechwood.

A short film has been produced by the VCO, which provides an insight into the work of the organisation.

Being part of a recovery community where they are understood and not judged is a crucial component of lasting recovery. Increasing the visibility of recovery in Middlesbrough ensures people know where to go for support before their lives become totally unmanageable. Multiple needs can be identified and relevant support sought from specialist providers can prevent a further downward spiral.

My Sisters Place – A brief overview

My Sisters Place was established in 2002. The VCO is an independent specialist 'One Stop Shop' for women aged 16 or over who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. The VCO provides an alternative service pathway - a 'non-authority' advice and assistance service. The VCO has a national profile for innovative work, which demonstrates effective long-term solutions for a range of domestic abuse situations, including complex cases. The VCO offers an 'open door' policy to engender timely access to the service, and offer a 'same day' response to victims. The VCO is based in central Middlesbrough and currently brings £350,000 a year into the town (through national charitable grants).

The VCO's approach is rooted in an understanding of the nature of violence against women and girls, and recognises the way intersecting factors such as age, ethnicity, sexuality and disability can affect women's experiences and the journey through recovery. Women and children have a right to live free from all forms of violence and abuse, and society has a duty to recognise and defend this right. The VCO takes this responsibility seriously and works with a wide range of partners to generate the best outcomes for women and children.

The VCO supports around 1000 women each year with a range of practical, legal and therapeutic processes to achieve the organisational core aims of: 'safety, justice, and improved health and wellbeing'. Services include advocacy, legal advice, housing assistance, outreach, court support, counselling and educational groups within a clear multi-agency framework.

40% of referrals received by the VCO are self-referrals but the majority of referrals are initiated by the police and the majority of victims are at 'high risk'. Earlier engagement with victims would be beneficial to each victim's long-term health outcomes and would be less costly for health and social care.

Gaps that currently exist in terms of prevention activities include:

- There are limited educational programmes on healthy relationships in Middlesbrough schools; these would support and strengthen long-term prevention strategies by ensuring awareness that domestic violence is wrong and by effecting cultural change.
- Only 1% of perpetrators receive any kind of intervention; referrals to mandatory programmes only become available when there is a risk of custody through the criminal justice system. Community programme referrals are usually triggered as a result of child protection concerns.
- Resources for victims are aimed at high-risk cases with strict gatekeeping procedures in place; this limits access and is a barrier to early intervention.
- Sixty percent of assaults are alcohol-related and there are presently no processes in place to ensure a joined-up approach between specialist services.
- Safeguarding (children) procedures can alienate adults from services; this often creates a culture of fear that prevents help seeking.
- Service user feedback indicates children who have witnessed abuse are not getting the services they need to retain strong parental bonds.

The VCO suggests a number of preventative solutions:

- The VCO is launching a community project in June 2016 to work directly with perpetrators at an early stage of the pattern of abuse. This is a pilot scheme linked to national pilot and the VCO are seeking support from partners in health and social care as a referral pathway.
- Early identification and referral, and organisational training/community awareness campaigns are critical. Domestic abuse needs to be everyone's business.
- There are models of good practice available to address the dual issues, for instance, alcohol misuse and mental health issues that it is recommended are explored further for potential local development.
- Safeguarding processes could be more supportive to non-abusive parents who are often struggling to parent effectively. The VCO has a good track record with these cases, a clear evidence base, and are seeking funding to deliver 'attachment based' programmes specifically tailored to this client group.