



**Lancaster District Community and Voluntary Solutions**

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**Wednesday 19th November 2014**

**Dear members, friends and colleagues,**

I feel compelled to write this letter because -- to your credit -- we Lancaster District Community Voluntary Solutions continue to believe we are part of our community. I am delighted to join the LDCVS team and it was a real pleasure to have met our members at our last AGM at the start of this month. For those who weren't able to attend, this is a summary of my main points from the AGM.

Lancaster CVS has always been led by a strong vision for the district and we in the charitable sector have especially appreciated the emphasis on inclusive democracy, community development, under-represented communities and the arts as components of that vision. A key part of this vision is ensuring that marginalised communities have the "locally grown" organisations they need to participate fully in the districts future. It is hard for us to envision a strong district that does not have strong community-based institutions in low-income communities, in BME communities, faith communities and in rural communities.

I joined CVS for a reason because firstly I am passionate about the VCFS and secondly because of the help I've received from this organisation over the past 17 years. In fact I got my first grant over 17 years ago as a volunteer to help young people in my community and then this was a catalyst for me to become more involved in communities. I'm born and raised in Lancaster, worked my entire career in the district and then took the steps to work in local communities. I started off as volunteer walking the streets of a local estate, meeting and helping people. This quickly led on to a few hours a week paid work with Lancashire County Council where I spent a couple of years learning the trade. Then the opportunity came up to manage a local charity working with vulnerable and hard to reach people in one of the toughest estates in the district. This was certainly a baptism of fire into how challenging the environment was for VCFS organisations!

I've spent the good part of 15 years working in the VCFS; working in partnership with many statutory and voluntary organisations including community groups; chasing funds; managing and upskilling staff and volunteers; managing contracts; trying to secure opportunities with local authorities; and constantly finding ways to engage with those who most need it.

I know what it's like to work on the frontline developing and managing projects that support adults suffering from mental health; marginalised young people; delivering affordable activities for children coming from low income families; supporting families with complex needs; safeguarding; child protection; supporting the elderly; working with BME groups - quite often on shoe string budgets - AND ultimately, trying to improve the lives and the environment of the local communities.

I know the current environment is tough for every frontline organisation in the district!! The competition to secure multiyear core costs is far greater than ever, with fewer grants available, declining grants from local authorities and a contract driven culture that is only available for those who can engage in the process! The expectation on our members to diversify and consider work that is new to them is increasing. We suffer when organisations chase after the "flavour of the month" in the name of innovation and leave

unsustainable efforts when the next flavour beckons. I hope with my frontline experience along with our team, we can help you in developing your organisation and delivering your services.

So how do we look to the future? It's too early for me to go into detail but like any other organisation we will need to invest in our own business and we will need to diversify to ensure sustainability in our own organisation. We intend to do this by being more proactive in securing grants that help grow our work and more importantly that offer you the support you need. Following a recent successful bid to the Big Assist programme, we as a team will be working closely with a specialist organisation called Social Enterprise Solutions, that will help us grow our organisation for the benefit of our members. We anticipate that our stakeholders will play a significant part in shaping our organisation and we very much look forward to involving you in our stakeholder mapping day in the New Year. Keep an eye out for our invite!

Certainly over the next few months, I recognise that we need to reconnect with new members and continue to support our existing members. I certainly hope that you will see more of us in future meetings and local networks to discuss how we can meet the needs of the sector and your organisation. We will concentrate on inclusive democracy especially with under-represented communities and those working on the frontline. We will work closer with funders and commissioners and work hard to find a way on ensuring funding reaches organisations in a fair and equitable way.

We will see further cuts in public services next year and we will also see commissioning of services to the sector grow.

We will help you interact effectively with each other and with local governments, as contractors, as advocates, and as partners in problem-solving and democracy.

We will review our training programme to reflect the changing needs of the sector to help ensure that you have the skills to work with your community. We will endeavour to find a way of making our courses affordable for those with lesser resources.

The work we currently offer in respect to volunteering, funding, advice and information around governance, training, policies, finances is second to none and delivered by professionals that have worked in the sector for many years. These services will grow and continue. I encourage our members to access or discover the wide range of services we have on offer.

I've been here over a month I am very grateful for the many supportive emails and well wishes I have received.

I hope the appointment of myself as the new CEO represents a moment of opportunity not only for the CVS, but also for all of the VCFS. Regardless of how you have felt about our service in recent years – I sincerely hope we can work together and support our members in the near future.

**Sincere regards**

**Yak Patel**

**Chief Executive Officer.**