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DECEMBER 2023

Shaping the Future Relationship with Government



Denise Hayward, CEO, Volunteer Now

The [Joint Forum](#) was set up in 1988 to promote regular dialogue between the Voluntary and Community Sector and Departments of the NI Government. The forum is made up of public sector representatives and a Voluntary and Community Sector Panel (VCS Panel) of 15 representatives elected from the sector. The VCS Panel meets with the government departments three times per year as the Joint Forum.

The Forum has been working on a review of the [Concordat](#) – an agreement which underpins the relationship and which was last updated in 2011. Minister Deirdre Hargey mandated the forum to undertake this review of the Concordat as part of a reset of the Joint Forum in September 2022.

The Forum has taken evidence from across the UK and Ireland about how the relationship between public bodies and the sector works elsewhere and the public policy and legislative frameworks which support these relationships.

In the past six months the Forum and in particular the VCS Panel has been shaping a set of values and practices to underpin these relationships in future. Our proposals are rooted in recognition of both sectors distinct yet complementary roles in contributing to the social, economic, environmental, and cultural life of Northern Ireland and the belief that by collaborating and working better together, we can increase our impact and agency. Any new Concordat/Agreement should act as a framework for improving partnership working which recognises and supports the contribution each makes to improving the lives of individuals and communities.

On the basis of this mutual understanding of each other's roles, it should be recognised that the VCS sector continues to be a key partner in formulating and delivering many aspects of public policy/services, and as such, there is a need to develop much stronger partnerships/relationships with government and its agencies. Many VCS sector organisations play a dual role, acting not only as advocates for change or improvement, but also delivering vital service and supports to beneficiaries and communities. A new Concordat/Agreement should recognise the importance of the VCS sector to a healthy, just and prosperous society, and set out how Government will work alongside and support the sector as a key partner in the years to come.

It should be noted that the VCS Panel is most keen to continue exploring the potential for any new agreement to be given a statutory footing by implementing legislation that would solidify the relationship between the VCS and the Northern Ireland Government and the commitments enshrined in any new concordat/agreement. However, we recognise that this process will take time and we therefore support, in the interim, a clearer link between the new Concordat/Agreement and the Programme for Government and other measures such as a Ministerial statement.

The VCS Panel has begun a process of engagement with the wider sector on these issues on 14 November 2023 in preparation for the public consultation by the Department for Communities on the values and principles of a new agreement. This [consultation](#), launched on 15 November, and we would encourage everyone in the sector to respond to this to help shape these important relationships.

In addition, the VCS Panel will be hosting a series of face to face and online events in January to engage with the sector in more detail on these issues and to ensure that we represent as wide a range of views as possible in our discussions on the final agreement. More details on venues etc. to follow in the next few weeks.

Denise Hayward, Co-Chair Joint Forum - on behalf of the VCS Panel



- Keeping Adults Safe; Recruitment, Selection & Management
- Keeping Adults Safe: Training for Staff & Volunteers
- Training for Office Bearers/Committee Members/Trustees
- Keeping Children & Adults Safe: An Introduction

[View Training Calendar](#)



Good Relations Awards 2024 - Open for Nominations!

The Good Relations Awards 2024 will spotlight the vital role that members of the community throughout Northern Ireland play in delivering peacebuilding and community cohesion.

The Good Relations Awards are run annually by the Community Relations Council in partnership with The Executive Office. They recognise exceptional commitment to Good Relations Work by those selfless individuals who go above and beyond, every single day, to make Northern Ireland a better place. The Awards celebrate those who unite and champion our local communities and they also showcase the wide range of projects connecting communities through peace, understanding and cultural respect.

There are five award categories:

- Community Relations Council Exceptional Achievement Award,
- Good Relations Volunteer of the Year Award,
- Good Relations Community Champion Award;
- Good Relations Youth Award (Under 25) and
- Good Relations Connecting Communities Project of the Year Award

If you know a local group, individual or organisation in Northern Ireland deserving of recognition for their work, then click the button below and nominate now for the 2024 Good Relations Awards. Closing date is **Tuesday 19 December 2023 at 12noon**.

**ACHIEVEMENT AWARD (PEACE BUILDING)****GOOD RELATIONS VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD****GOOD RELATIONS COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD****GOOD RELATIONS YOUTH AWARD (UNDER 25)****GOOD RELATIONS CONNECTING COMMUNITIES
PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARD****NOMINATE NOW AT**
goodrelationsawards.com[Nominate Now!](#)**RESEARCH
SERIES
NUMBER 171
NOVEMBER
2023****CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG
YOUNG ADULTS IN IRELAND**

JAMES LAURENCE AND EMER SMYTH

**Volunteering Benefits Young Adults' Wellbeing & Confidence as Adults**

New research, published by the ESRI, and produced in partnership with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) in Ireland, shows that volunteering can improve young adults' life outcomes.

Using data on children born in 1998 from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study, the findings show that 20-year-olds who volunteer are more satisfied with their lives and are more confident of themselves as adults. For more details, click the button below.

[Find Out More](#)



New Youth Advisory Partnership Launched!

The Youth Advisory Partnership is a collective consisting of young activists and representatives from partner organisations. The Partnership will explore issues surrounding youth engagement in volunteering, social action, and activism, while developing strategies based on experiences of young people and partners to increase engagement. The event which took place in The Mac Theatre heard from some of the young members of the partnership and Denise Hayward, CEO, Volunteer Now and Matthew Williams, Volunteer Participation Officer, Volunteer Now. The launch well attended with representatives from Bytes Project, Scouts NI, Pure Mental, National Childrens Bureau and the NI Youth Assembly present.

A huge thank you to all who attended and showed their support for the Youth Advisory Partnership at the launch event. We look forward to working collectively with all young people and partners in the New Year.

Consultation on Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure Support

The Department for Communities is seeking views on draft proposals for future infrastructure support of the Voluntary & Community Sector in Northern Ireland.

The consultation is open until 9 February 2024 and you can view the proposed framework and consultation documents [here](#).



The Department welcomes views and responses via email – vcsinfrastructure@communities-ni.gov.uk and there is one in-person workshop consultation events left, where you can also share your thoughts, ideas or comments:

Thur 14 Dec, 11am-12.30pm in The Duncairn Centre, Belfast - Register below.

[Register Here](#)



Civic Initiative

The Civic Initiative is a new participatory structure set up in partnership with a wide-range of civic society organisations to give voice to people and communities on the issues that matter.

The Initiative is currently actioning a people-led examination of key socioeconomic rights under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement including housing, healthcare, education, human rights, rural access, political institutions, poverty and cultural issues.

Civic initiative wants to hear from you. Register for one of the regional People's Forums below – participants from border counties in the Republic of Ireland are also encouraged to register. The Civic Initiative can provide travel reimbursement.

[Thursday 18 January 2024, 5.30-9.00pm, Strabane](#)

[Saturday 27 January 2024, 9.30am-1.00pm, Dundalk](#)

[Find Out More](#)

Investing in Volunteers Congratulations!

Congratulations to [COPE Galway](#) and [Lagan Valley Regional Park](#), who both renewed and [Extern](#), who achieved their first Investing in Volunteers quality standard in December!

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. By being assessed against the standard, your organisation can publicly demonstrate its commitment to good practice and receive a National Award for quality in volunteer management. Click below to find out more.



[Find Out More](#)



Introducing: Clara O'Callaghan Volunteer Support Officer

I'm Clara O'Callaghan and I am the Volunteer Support Officer for the Newry, Mourne & Down region. I support organisations across the district with anything to do with volunteering i.e. recruiting volunteers, volunteer management, governance, Access NI's, Employer Supported volunteering, mobile volunteering and more. I also support the public in finding suitable volunteer roles and experiences as well as working alongside schools, statutory bodies, community groups and businesses.

What do my work days typically look like?

Well on Monday morning I could be in Saintfield helping a group with volunteer recruitment. In the afternoon I could be processing Access NI's for a group in Castlewellan. Tuesday morning could be a workshop on benefits of volunteering in Crossmaglen and Tuesday afternoon I could have a mobile volunteering session in Ballykinlar. A lot of emails are typed up in the wee Aygo in all corners of South Down and South Armagh!

[Contact Clara](#)

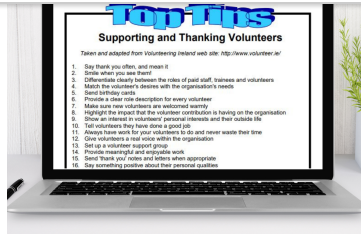
Member Spotlight

Welcome Organisation

The Welcome Organisation help people affected by homelessness through a range of services including a Drop-in Centre, Street Outreach service, Crisis Accommodation for Women, Floating Support service, Catherine House supported accommodation for women and our Mobile Health Unit.



[Welcome Organisation](#)



As we approach Christmas and the New Year, many of you may be considering how you can thank your volunteers for all of their hard work over the previous weeks, months and even year. In this document, there are 100 ideas on how you can thank volunteers!

We hope this will provide you with some unique ways to thank your team.

Supporting & Thanking Volunteers



New Members

Welcome to our newest organisational members: [ReConnect Gloucestershire](#), [English Heritage](#), Seafort House & Towell Building Trust Ltd. This brings our organisational members total to 1082!



Flexible, accessible training

Did you know you can learn all you need to know about volunteer management in just 8 hours with our on demand courses? You can complete these anytime, anywhere & on any device! Click below to find out more.

[Become A Member](#)

[Find Out More](#)



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