

Step Change Final Report

Executive Summary

1. The Step Change Initiative in Yorkshire and Humberside was funded through the Cabinet Office (initially the Home Office) with the aim of increasing the number of significant projects and services delivered to offenders by VCS providers. This was in the context of a wider government drive to expand VCS participation in the delivery of public services, and to create a partnership approach to tackling social exclusion.
2. NOMS in Yorkshire and Humberside was chosen as the pilot site for this work as the Regional Offender Manager had demonstrated his commitment to developing partnerships and enhancing engagement with VCS providers through the creation of a VCS Pathway Action Team and the inclusion of a set of actions intended to reduce barriers to VCS participation within the Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan.
3. Funding was provided to employ a Step Change Development Manager and some administrative support for 12 months from April 2006. A secondee from a large national VCS organisation was appointed to the manager post and a serving prisoner (eligible for external employment) was appointed to the administrative post).
4. A steering group, comprised of key stakeholders (prisons, probation, Cabinet Office, NOMS, private sector and voluntary sector) was established to steer the work of the project and help take forward shared objectives

Key objectives were:

- **To achieve a greater spend on VCS service provision by NOMS and partner agencies**
- **To support the development of consortia involving VCS/public/private sector organisations and have them submitting bids and delivering services**
- **To secure greater involvement by VCS in developing a commissioning model in partnership with other providers, service users and commissioners**
- **To help develop increased capacity within mainstream services to meet offender cultural and gender specific needs**
- **To advise on ways of ensuring that BME and gender specialist services are commissioned to meet inclusion needs**

5. The work of the Step Change Initiative was significantly supported by the success of two Change-up funded projects operating in the Region. The Clinks CRISP initiative and the Nacro MOVE project both engaged in activity of benefit to Step Change – in particular, promotion of NOMS through conferences, training and action learning sets, and the development of capacity building support and partnership building.
6. The major increases in VCS service delivery achieved during the lifetime of Step Change were through three significant new services, established with new resources. The Together Women Programme (a national pilot programme addressing and preventing offending by women, operating in Y&H and the North West) the Bail Support Scheme (funded through a successful Invest to Save bid and providing packages of bail support to defendants at risk of custodial remand) and the Bail Information Scheme (a probation pathfinder project that supported the work of the Bail Support Scheme). All three programmes are delivered by VCS led partnerships. These schemes all demonstrate that where new resources are available, NOMS in the region, aims to bring new providers into the market.
7. Step Change had no commissioning budget so much of the activity undertaken was aimed at raising awareness and capacity building. Activity included:
 - Identifying target areas of need linked to pathways
 - Consultation with stakeholders
 - Agreement of priority areas for action and target outcomes
 - Identifying other regional and local VCS infrastructure/capacity building and support bodies (including those working with BME organisations) and developing links with these
 - Forging links with a wide range of VCS organisations and promoting NOMS
 - Promoting the VCS 'offering' to prisons and probation
 - Identifying external funding streams that could be used to support VCS service delivery and assisting organisations to make bids
 - Contribution to the development of a commissioning model for the region and a regional commissioning plan
 - Contribution to the implementation of the Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan (RRAP)
 - Contribution to refreshing the RRAP and the consultation process
 - Promoting the need for and developing the means to effectively consult with service users
 - Promoting the need for and developing the means to effectively address race equality
 - Highlighting the importance of the provision of culturally competent service delivery and promoting the potential role of VCS providers in this area of work
 - Supporting the development of partnerships and VCS led consortia
 - Seeking feedback on commissioning activity and sharing the learning from this
8. Close engagement with and support from colleagues within prisons and probation was the key to Step Change's success. This involved establishing positive relationships and identifying shared

goals. Collaborative working and knowledge sharing was central to the approach and resulted in some mutually beneficial outcomes. Step Change Steering Group meetings were the key structure for sharing information and driving further progress.

9. Prisons were required by the SLA with the ROM to demonstrate an increase in VCS service delivery but had no financial target to meet. Probation Areas were subject to a national target to achieve a 5% spend in 2006-07 and to develop sub-contracting plans for 2007-08 that would achieve a 10% spend.
10. The probation Regional Business Development Manager and the Prison Service Community Partnerships Manager were key strategic colleagues in driving forward the Step Change agenda. Information on progress was provided on a regular basis and joint, collaborative work was undertaken.
11. Probation Areas in Y&H achieved an expenditure level in 2006-07 that was around the national average – i.e. 3.33%. Sub-contracting plans were useful vehicles for developing strategy in relation to VCS and private sector service delivery but in a context in which there were to be no significant new resources. Nevertheless, some interesting ideas were put forward, although there was a considerable focus on the re-deployment of existing probation staff into VCS organisations by way of secondments.
12. Prisons benefited by the maintenance of three existing area contracts for the provision of housing advice, ETE advice and CARATS. However, no significant new expenditure was achieved. Despite this (and in some cases as a consequence of raised awareness due to Step Change and Change-up) several new services were established, particularly at the large local establishments. There was a significant expansion in the number of designated, full-time VCS Co-ordinators in establishments and this was particularly important. One continual theme to emerge from consultation with the prison VCS Co-ordinators was the need for better training for them and commissioning budgets that could be used to buy services.
13. The Step Change Initiative was able to produce some useful learning for commissioners - key messages are:
 - Tendering processes need to be accessible, transparent and properly communicated in timely fashion.
 - Training and support should be made available to small VCS organisations to build capacity.
 - Culture change required within NOMS/Prisons/Probation
 - Sensible timescales for tenders are a must.
 - NOMS to encourage communication between VCS and prisons and probation to ensure that delivery plans are achievable

14. The refreshed Reducing Re-offending Action Plan contains some priorities in relation to commissioning, these include the need to ensure that VCS views and experience of NOMS, prisons and probation tendering and contracting are captured and disseminated, the need to ensure that NOMS honours the commitments set out in the Government Publication *Action Plan for the Third Sector* and to ensure that the learning from the Change-up projects is used.
15. The Step Change objectives in relation to Equality and Diversity were partially met. An event to promote race equality was held in June 2006 and this served as a useful starting point for engagement with a number of BME led VCS organisations. One such organisation was successful in achieving a NOMS national grant for work with the children and families of South Asian offenders in Kirklees. Work with prisons and probation on community engagement needs to continue – BME VCS expertise in training for prison and probation staff exists in the region and, should funds be available, this expertise should be purchased. A model for the delivery of culturally competent services also exists and NOMS should find the resources to develop this model.
16. Delivery Partnerships in which VCS organisations are lead bodies can be successful (SOVA, Nacro and Foundation Housing have demonstrated this) however, there are significant administrative, financial and governance issues that need to be considered and resourced. If NOMS aims to achieve the objectives set out in Public Value Partnerships these issues must be addressed.
17. **Partnerships in Public Service: an Action Plan for the Third Sector** – a government publication that sets out actions intended to develop a cross-departmental approach to breaking down barriers to VCS participation in public service delivery – contains key strategic actions for NOMS. There is a need for regional mechanisms to drive forward these actions and measure progress. The VCS Pathway Action Team should be reconfigured to include some of the former members of the Step Change Steering Group in order to contribute to this agenda.

18. Recommendations and Exit Strategy

- (1) That the VCS Pathway Actions of the Yorkshire and Humberside Reducing Re-offending Action Plan be delivered through a reconfigured VCS Pathway Action Team
- (2) That the re-configured VCS Pathway Action Team combines membership from the former Step Change Steering Group and the former VCS PAT
- (3) That consideration be given to the ROM joining the reconfigured VCS PATHWAY team which will be chaired by VCS lead in order for VCS to retain their strategic leadership role within RRAP delivery
- (4) That objectives 3 and 4 of the VCS section of the Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan, on race equality and service user engagement, be delivered through the formation of two expert working groups, working across all pathways, comprised of members of all

pathways, supported by members of the Reducing Re-offending Team and reporting to the RRAP Board

- (5) That the re-configured VCS Pathway Action Team acts as a source of expert advice on commissioning models that address VCS participation and that this expertise is offered to Probation Boards (or Trusts) as they develop sub-contracting plans.
- (6) That the re-configured VCS Pathway Action Team offers advice and expertise to the Prison Service as they develop local commissioning of VCS providers.
- (7) That prison and probation managers be encouraged by the ROM to explore ways of commissioning VCS organisations to provide expertise in diversity and equality training
- (8) That the learning from the Step Change initiative be widely shared through appropriate dissemination of the Final Report
- (9) That NOMS support a VCS capacity building bid to Future Builders and consider commissioning the service in the future
- (10) That the Reducing Re-offending Team continue to participate in the Regional Forum drive to establish a Regional Commissioning Forum
- (11) That, through regular communication channels such as the RRAP newsletter and ROM bulletin, NOMS in Yorkshire and Humberside ensures that VCS organisations receive timely and clear information about how commissioning is developing and what opportunities exist for tendering
- (12) That NOMS in Yorkshire and Humberside continues to champion VCS engagement in the strategy to reduce re-offending and shares the learning with colleagues in NOMS nationally and in other regions

19. Recommendations for NOMS Nationally

- (1) Establish mechanisms that will ensure implementation of *Partnerships in Public Service: Action Plan for the Third Sector* at regional and local level
- (2) Wherever and whenever possible engage in commissioning activity that will enable VCS service providers to offer services
- (3) Consider the possibility of each NOMS Region having a responsibility for driving forward VCS engagement and leading on capacity building for the sector

- (4) Given that most commissioning opportunities for the VCS will be at local level, provide models of sub-contracting that probation areas and prisons are required to use**
- (5) Provide clarification of the term 'lead provider' and spell out the implications of this for the VCS**
- (6) Expand and develop the NOMS Grants Programme and delegate responsibility for administering and awarding grants to NOMS in the regions**
- (7) Establish mechanisms for utilising the expertise of the BME led VCS to develop culturally competent models of service delivery**