



NAVCA Annual Conference 2022

Thinking Space: Tackling poverty locally

17th November 2022

Our annual conference took place in Manchester on 17th November 2022 and was sponsored by AideCRM, Volunteer Plus and the National Cyber Security Centre. This write-up is for all conference attendees and members who were not able to attend. We hope you find it valuable and helpful.

The theme of our conference was *tackling poverty locally*. With the cost of living crisis impacting increasing numbers of people in the communities that our members work with, our conference aimed to create a space where we could learn about this issue from different perspectives. From the ways in which poverty affects health, to the disproportionate impact of poverty on marginalised communities, we explored different issues through facilitated workshop sessions and keynote speeches.

Keynote speakers and workshops:

Keynote speaker: Greg Fell, Director of Public Health in Sheffield.

Keynote speaker: Jake Ferguson, Strategic Advisor at the Black Equity Organisation and former CEO of Hackney CVS.

Workshop: Making the most of an ethnically diverse Britain, hosted by Stella Ngozi Mbubaegbu.

Workshop: Trans inclusion is for everyone, hosted by Christopher Owen from Manchester Pride.

Workshop: Food Insecurity and Cultural Awareness, hosted by Atiha Chaudry from the Rafiki Network and Graham Whitam from Greater Manchester Poverty Action.

Workshop: Health inequalities, hosted by a team from NAVCA member Community Links Bromley.

Workshop: Poverty Truth Commissions, hosted by a team from NAVCA member York CVS.

Workshop: Presenting the findings of the *Connecting Locally* research project, hosted by Dr Rob Macmillan from Sheffield Hallam University.

Workshop: Keeping your organisation safe, a cyber security workshop hosted by the National Cyber Security Centre.

Workshop: Resilience, hosted by Bruce Mann from the National Preparedness Commission.

This write-up includes links to relevant resources, including speaker presentations where available. We hope you find it useful! [You can view more information about the conference on our website.](#) You can also explore tweets from the day using the hashtag #NAVCAConference22.

Keynote speech: Greg Fell, Director of Public Health for Sheffield and Vice-President of the Association of Directors of Public Health: *Where and how health is created, and why that matters?*

Key learning points:

- **Health is not ‘what is the matter’ with people, but ‘what matters’ to people.**
- **We need to change the status quo when it comes to talking about and acting on health, but this won’t be an easy task. We need to build a burning platform for change.**
- **What is the modern-day equivalent of the Victorian investment in parks and drains? What societal changes should be made now to drastically improve public health?**

We know that health is greatly impacted by poverty, and Greg gave the opening keynote speech on broadening our perceptions of what health is. He started off by explaining that the equitable distribution of food, good quality housing, income, pollution free environments and green spaces as the main determinants of health. Health is not working backwards from avoiding hospital admissions, but needs to be framed as creating health and wellbeing and then working forwards from there. He wants us to begin to see wellbeing as economic, social, ecological and personal.

Inequalities are inherent throughout society including the health system. Austerity and neoliberalism are major contributors to health inequalities, with the privatisation of profit and socialisation of risk. Greg’s four biggest risks to health were:

- Neo-liberal trickle down policies and thinking
- Commercial influences in determining public health policy
- Public sector finances – including spending by local authorities
- The hegemony of medicine (medical intervention rather than looking at health more holistically).

Greg posed conference attendees the question, *how do we solve health inequalities?* He offered a few suggestions.

- Instead of accepting health inequalities, de-normalise them.
- Redistribute resources.
- Invest more in the programmes and interventions we currently have that make a difference.
- Invest in better connectivity and coordination between policy and service areas.
- Be more political - not party political, but moral and human rights-focused.
- Deal with the ‘elephants’ (legacy of austerity, poverty, no new investment).

Greg stated that the creation of health needs:

- A redistribution of power.
- The development of networks of relationships, friendships and contacts.
- An economic policy that takes health as well as other goods into account. For example, the social outcomes and wellbeing of a population are as important as GDP.
- All costs and consequences including all externalities included on the balance sheet, e.g. acknowledging carbon emissions, rather than only financial costs.
- Revaluing the future to invest in younger generations

[You can view Greg’s presentation here.](#)

Workshop: *Making the most of an ethnically diverse Britain*, by Stella Mbubaegbu from the [Black Leadership Group](#)

Key learning points:

- **Black people, communities and businesses make a huge contribution to society, but this contribution is limited by the effects of entrenched racism.**
- **In recruitment, we need to make sure we are genuinely inclusive rather than just tokenistic.**
- **When it comes to anti-racism, it is better that people are open to exploring their shortcomings.**

The session began with a background of the [Black Leadership Group \(BLG\)](#). We then moved on to defining anti-racism as an ongoing process of challenging systemic racism. The core of the presentation focused on the UK's Black Dividend, the contribution of Black people, communities, and businesses, to society. These contributions are limited however by the effects of entrenched racist practices, especially in education as demonstrated by the statistics presented by Stella.

The second half of the workshop involved round table discussions with questions presented to the speaker, creating spaces for the participants to explore ideas and expand their thinking on topics like recruitment and how to become a genuinely anti-racist organisation.

Stella emphasised the importance of publicity and accountability when it comes to anti-racism and explained that, in order to progress on our own anti-racism journeys, we must be willing to be vulnerable and open to exploring the shortcomings we all have. Participants expressed concern that sometimes they felt like they didn't know the appropriate language to use when talking about race and racism, but the group discussed ways to overcome this such as training for staff teams.

In striving towards inclusivity, several members at the tables presented their progress with hiring practices: deformalising the application process, providing skills training, diversifying advertising locations and methods for job postings, and embracing a broader ethos of valuing people over skills.

Finally, participants were tasked with bringing some action points back home with them so that they could continue their anti-racism journey within their respective organisations.



Workshop: *Trans Inclusion is for Everyone*, hosted by Christopher Owen, Inclusivity Development Manager at [Manchester Pride](#)

Key learning points:

- **There is a lack of employment opportunities for transgender people, and unemployment can lead to poverty.**
- **25% of trans people have experienced homelessness or discrimination when buying or renting property.**
- **LGBTQ+ inclusion in general is quite common now, but trans inclusion in particular is still lacking.**

Christopher led an incredibly useful, engaging, and thought-provoking session, making it clear that this workshop was a safe space to not know things and ask questions without judgement. This is particularly important as a lack of confidence in understanding trans issues can lead to a lack of inclusion, even by those with good intentions.

Christopher highlighted that while LGBTQ+ inclusion in general is quite common now, trans inclusion (and work towards it) in particular is still lacking. For many transgender people, the transition process is about being and feeling seen, which is why inclusion within our organisations and in society is so important. Christopher explained how transphobia means that no one, including cisgender people, can safely explore their identity and authentic self-expression.

Christopher linked transphobia to poverty by explaining that, compared to cisgender people, there is a lack of employment opportunities for transgender people, and it is a known fact that unemployment leads to poverty for many. For example, 25% of trans people have experienced homelessness or discrimination when buying or renting property.

Christopher gave the group some practical actions to work towards trans liberation:

- Manchester Pride offers the All Equals Charter, an intersectional LGBTQ+ membership programme for businesses and organisations, which supports members with improving workplace EDI, tackling systemic oppression and directly engaging with and supporting local LGBTQ+ communities.
- Everyday relations: think about what you can do as an individual to educate others about trans identities and inclusion.
- For organisations: who can you work with to improve trans people's access to opportunities?
- Bureaucracy: where do policies/rules need to be re-written to support trans people's success?

The group left with more knowledge and confidence about transgender terms and issues, and with some useful action points to work towards better trans inclusion.

[You can view Christopher's presentation here.](#)



Workshop: *Food Insecurity and Cultural Awareness*, hosted by Atiha Chaudry from the [Rafiki Food Network](#) and Graham Whitham from [Greater Manchester Poverty Action](#)

Key learning points:

- **Organisations should be culturally aware and sensitive to different needs.**
- **Organisations should talk to communities and individuals first about what is needed.**
- **A ‘cash first approach’ may be most appropriate for some and evidence suggests that it is not misused.**

Food insecurity is an important issue in many of the communities that our members work with. Atiha and Graham, who work in Manchester to support vulnerable and marginalised people access food, hosted a workshop on alternative models to foodbanks that seek to empower underrepresented communities and develop capacity and solutions.

Atiha began by introducing her organisation, the Rafiki Network, and some of the specific challenges they were addressing regarding a lack of cultural consideration in preparing and delivering food parcels. Issues included a lack of cultural sensitivity from services when it came to emergency food provision. Now, as Graham explained, Greater Manchester Poverty Action are promoting and trialling a ‘cash first’ response to people in financial difficulty to give them greater autonomy, dignity and control.

Atiha and Graham set 3 questions for table discussion:

- How do we address food insecurity for diverse communities and meet their cultural needs?
- Are there opportunities to do things differently?
- How do we best meet the needs of low-income families?

Participants shared their own local experiences and solutions of distributing food aid and other support services to diverse communities. The common thread was the importance of talking to individuals and communities about what is needed and what works. This work must also not be assumed to be done in a vacuum and the community, most familiar with its own cultural needs, should be given a central role in all cases.

The ideas of dignity and enablement as primary values when distributing aid were widely supported. Some questioned the ‘cash first approach’ as not suitable for some communities or groups of people, but others rebutted with experience and evidence that cash is not misused.

Participants left with a sense of purpose and motivation to do something in their own communities to support food insecurity in a culturally sensitive way.

Workshop: Health Inequalities, hosted by Hugh Stultz and Christopher Evans from [Community Links Bromley](#)

Key learning points:

- **Only through effective co-production are the best services designed and the best results achieved for beneficiaries.**
- **It is important that diverse experiences and stories are told and listened to.**
- **Seek funding for dedicated VCSE representational roles, and where this funding exists use it strategically.**

For many of our members, health and wellbeing is a key aspect of their work. This workshop, hosted by a team from NAVCA member Community Links Bromley, explored how people are impacted by health inequalities and what NAVCA members can do to tackle this issue locally.

[The Cornerstone Project](#) is a three-year project to improve co-design and co-production of health and wellbeing services, enable greater practical engagement between VCS, communities and health services, and to test new approaches and share learning. The project works across five London boroughs looking at specific aspects of health and social care, particularly aiming at listening to and working with underreached or underrepresented groups.

The VCSE sector in the area is diverse and complex with at least 6000 organisations and is acknowledged by the ICB as a vital partner in addressing health inequalities through supporting people to have good health, remain well and avoid needing hospital services. ICB provides £360K for three years to pay for a VCSE representative on the ICB, to convene the VCSE forum and the health and wellbeing alliance. This partnership aims to improve health outcomes, tackle inequalities, enhance productivity and value for money in use of health and care resources, and help the NHS support broader social and economic development in South East London.

Christopher and Hugh posed the questions: How can the development of new Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) help tackle poverty locally? What role can we play as infrastructure organisations? Answers from the group included:

- Gather insight and data across different themes and communities so that voices are heard properly: tell stories backed up with data.
- Represent in an appropriate way – look for fairness with several VCSE reps to start to represent diversity.
- Make use of dedicated roles where this funding exists e.g. two roles one operational, one strategic.

Where might NAVCA focus its efforts to support members' work to embed the VCSE in new emerging systems?

- Identify and share examples of effective partnerships e.g. investment in representation, diversity of relationships and approaches to provision, their activities and outcomes.
- Creating a resource and learning space where colleagues can learn from each other.
- Advocating for more seats around the table locally, regionally, and nationally.

[You can view Christopher and Hugh's presentation here.](#)



[Poverty Truth Commissions](#) workshop, hosted by, Gary Everett, Ali Bodley and Alison Semmence from [York CVS](#)

Key learning points:

- **It is crucial that people who have experienced poverty play a central role in achieving change.**
- **Community commissioners developing genuine relationships with civic commissioners is a key part of success.**
- **For the commissioners, being able to see positive outcomes and action, rather than just financial compensation, is seen as very valuable.**

Poverty Truth Commissions seek to answer the question, 'what if people who have experienced poverty were involved in making decisions about tackling poverty?'. Collectively, each local Commission works to understand the nature of poverty, the underlying issues that create poverty and explore creative ways of addressing them. This workshop, facilitated by a team from NAVCA member York CVS, explored how other NAVCA members can help to set up Poverty Truth Commissions in their local areas.

Gary and Ali began by explaining that a fundamental principle of the Poverty Truth Commissions (PTC) is that people experiencing poverty have a key role in achieving change. A PTC seeks to build a relationship between those experiencing poverty and those with power to make a difference. This is not standard coproduction, but involves bringing people together to start by sharing their experiences of poverty.

Listening, time and relationship-building are essential in the early stages of the PTC. Gary and Ali emphasised that allowing the commissioners with lived experience to decide what they want to do is crucial, and that patience is an important quality in this process. Community commissioners developing genuine relationships with civic commissioners is a key part of success.

The group discussed the issue of commissioners being paid for their involvement, but this can lead to problems due to benefit restrictions and the risk of benefits being stopped. Another option could be to provide meals for the commissioners. However, Ali and Gary also shared their experience that some community commissioners do not want to be paid, as they feel this devalues their conversation. Being able to see positive outcomes and action, rather than financial compensation, is seen as very valuable.

Workshop participants agreed that it would be helpful to have NAVCA support or involvement to help the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) develop a view on how Commissioners can be remunerated without it impacting their receipt of benefits.

[You can view Gary, Ali and Alison's presentation here.](#)

Research – *Connecting Locally*: by Dr Rob Macmillan from Sheffield Hallam University

Key learning points:

- **It is essential to show the value and impact of local infrastructure to funders, VCSE sector and strategic partners.**
- **There is value in working other members of the NAVCA network to share ideas, good practice and knowledge.**
- **Infrastructure support should be of high quality with its nature and shape realistically reflected in the funding available.**

Connecting Locally: local voluntary and community infrastructure in England shows that NAVCA members directly support community based VCSE organisations at place, working in partnership with local councils, health and care systems and other statutory organisations. Local infrastructure organisations give strategic leadership for the VCSE sector and advocate for its role within and contribution to communities and wider systems.

[You can read the full research project and see our useful infographic here.](#)

The research paves the way for strategic conversations between local infrastructure, local government, local and national partner organisations, independent funders and policymakers around two questions:

- What might a firmer and more secure funding settlement to support the role of local VCSE infrastructure look like, and how might it be realised?
- What reasonable expectations might work alongside such a settlement, about how infrastructure should be organised and what it would deliver, in terms of level of service, quality and outcomes?

Discussion of these two questions covered:

- Identifying ways to tell our story in a smarter way, to explain infrastructure effectively, demonstrate value for commissioners and funders, show importance of having an anchor organisation at place, and show social value and impact.
- The importance and value of sharing information and good practice, developing a professional development space, and creating opportunities for peer networking across NAVCA network.

Some suggested actions for NAVCA were:

- To agree key messages in local infrastructure and promote them with key partners.
- Demonstrate need for long term strategic investment at place for VCSE infrastructure.
- Explore potential for regular briefing events for government officials in different departments to demonstrate importance and value of infrastructure.
- Challenge members to have an expectation of quality infrastructure provision – taking different budgets into account.
- Review where infrastructure organisations have closed and what has happened afterwards (there are 20 local authority areas where CVSs have closed).

[You can view Rob's presentation here.](#)

Workshop: Keeping your organisation safe, by the [National Cyber Security Centre](#)

Key learning points:

- **Charities and community groups are often at a higher risk of cyber attack due to limited resources and capacity.**
- **Maintaining strong cyber security helps improve trust from funders, volunteers and service users.**
- **The NCSC has lots of useful and quick tips to keep your organisation safe.**

This workshop was held by one of our sponsors, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC).

Cyber security is important in the context of tackling poverty locally, because NAVCA members and the groups they support are often working with vulnerable people who may have limited knowledge about how to keep themselves safe online.

The workshop hosts began by asking the group to consider the importance of the data that charities hold, such as key information about people 'at risk'. Small charities are less likely to have external IT support and can rely on staff and volunteers using their own devices, and therefore there is an increased risk of cyber attack.

If a cyber attack does occur, there can be a loss of trust in the organisation from funders, trustees, volunteers and service users. The recovery process can also be a source of stress for staff and volunteers. This is why it is so important for people working in the voluntary and community sector to have an increased understanding of cyber security and how to keep their organisations safe.

The team from NCSC gave workshop participants some useful tips on how to protect your organisation:

- Back up data regularly.
- Protect devices from malware by using antivirus software, keeping devices and software updated, not downloading dodgy apps, and controlling the use of USBs and memory cards.

In order to keep devices safe, you should:

- Use password protection.
- Ensure stolen devices can be tracked, locked and wiped.
- Keep devices and apps updated.
- Don't connect to unknown Wi-Fi hotspots.

When it comes to passwords, you should:

- Avoid using the same password lots of times.
- Don't change your password too often as this can be more to remember.

Some useful tips regarding phishing were:

- You can report phishing emails by forwarding them to report@phishing.gov.uk.
- [Check out the CPNI Digital Footprint Campaign.](#)

[You can view the full cyber security presentation here.](#)

Workshop: Resilience, hosted by Bruce Mann from the [National Preparedness Commission](#)

Key learning points:

- **People experiencing poverty are also likely to suffer the most during times of crisis.**
- **Local infrastructure organisations are well-placed to help people during emergencies due to their knowledge of the local communities.**
- **It is important that local authorities, local resilience forums and NAVCA members work together and coordinate emergency response.**

In emergencies, such as the pandemic or extreme weather events, it is people in poverty who are likely to suffer most.

One way for NAVCA members to help the most vulnerable and marginalised communities is through involvement in their local resilience forum (LRF).

Local infrastructure can contribute to local risk assessments because they have a good understanding of the communities they work in. As NAVCA members are also well connected to their communities, they can communicate key messages in times of crisis.

Local resilience forums need to find out their vulnerabilities and where there are gaps in reach, so they should be starting to reach out more to local infrastructure organisations.

In some areas, there was an issue with the local authorities not communicating with the local VCSE sector during the pandemic, and there is currently an enquiry looking at local authority response during covid.

Bruce emphasised the importance of communication between all organisations and people involved in crisis response, due to some circumstances where there had been misplaced help from volunteers who had not been trained. There can be consequences to misplaced support, which is why it is so important to train volunteers in general steps they can take in emergencies.



Keynote speech: Jake Ferguson, Strategic Advisor to the [Black Equity Organisation](#) and former CEO of Hackney CVS: *Building Black power and addressing systemic racism – my story as a CVS leader and strategist*

Key learning points:

- **We have come a long way in terms of tackling racism but there is still a long way to go – and the voluntary and community sector has a big role to play in this.**
- **Black- and Brown-led organisations get disproportionately less funding, and we need to address this structural inequality.**
- **Important role for NAVCA members to reach out to local Black-led organisations, build trust and work together effectively.**

Jake Ferguson rounded off the conference by giving a keynote speech on how NAVCA members can proactively develop measures to centre Black voices and radical thinking on operations to build wealth and power creation for Black people.

Jake began by sharing some of his own experiences of racism on a personal and systemic level, including attempts by his local council in the early 2000s to replace Hackney CVS. Back then, no one was talking about racism and Jake often experienced being the only Black person in a room.

Over time, Hackney CVS pulled together evidence and data to act as the foundation for system change. One project they set up was Hackney Account that monitors policing in Hackney, giving young black people power. However, they have found that it has been difficult to engage the Metropolitan Police on getting anti-racism training for example, or on apologising to people they have wrongly stopped and searched.

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) needs to lead on issues of inclusion and addressing racism. Jake gave the example that a disproportionately small number of Black and Brown-led organisations get a fair proportion of funding. The [Baobab Foundation](#) has lots of useful data and information to help support structural inequalities strategies.

Jake shared a lot of useful tips for NAVCA members, a key one being to reach out to local Black-led organisations to find out how to work together. Other tips included developing a local anti-racism/pro-Black action plan with your public sector partners and in your Integrated Care System partnerships. A key focus was on being deliberative, not performative – celebrating your work and sharing why you are doing it.

[You can view Jake's presentation here.](#)