

REVIEW OF OUR RACE ACTION PLAN AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

Outcomes, Learning and
Our Continuing Journey
To Make Sheffield
An Anti-Racist City

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Introduction

This report gives our account of how we have engaged, listened and responded to develop anti-racism action over the last 24 months. We describe how our understanding has grown and what our staff, trustees and members have said about our progress.

We have also shared what we have learned about where we can have impact, and how we will maintain momentum and make measurable progress that contributes to the aims set by our Board of Trustees, together with the recommendations of Sheffield's Race Equality Commission, to deliver our shared responsibility to make Sheffield an anti-racist city.

Andy Buck
Chair of Trustees



Helen Sims
Chief Executive Officer



Background

In September 2020 Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS) made a submission to the Race Equality Commission that reflected our understanding of racism in the city and gave examples of inequality in leadership and governance, in decision making, in accessing and securing money; essentially in all structures in the city.

We acknowledged that VAS was complicit in structural racism and set out our journey of action to become an anti-racist organisation and tackle racial inequality within the voluntary and community sector in the city.

In the last twenty-four months, we have been on a journey to understand the part that VAS is playing in the prevalence of structural racism in Sheffield. We have reached out to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, volunteers, leaders and community activists and listened to the frustration felt by many people.

We have heard a range of experiences; some very positive feedback about individuals and specific projects, but also some deeply negative experiences. We have heard direct feedback about the negative impact of VAS and our structures and behaviours, and around city systems and processes within which we are complicit.

We are grateful to the people who have engaged with us to tell us about their lived experience and describe the burden of racism. We are humbled by the strength of VAS staff, volunteers and community leaders, who have given their time and insight to talk to us and enable our anti-racism journey.

To the people and organisations who have not felt heard, included, or served by us, we are sorry. We are working harder to be more accessible, open and inclusive in all we do, and will continue to do so.

VAS Race Action Plan

Internal action plan launched September 2020

In September 2020, we set up a working group of VAS staff and trustees to identify priorities for action focussed on the key themes of:

- leadership
- values and behaviour
- engagement
- funding
- education and training
- analysis of data.

We developed our Anti-Racism Action Plan, which was used by the working group to check progress and is directly overseen by the VAS Board, to whom the working group reported at quarterly full board meetings.

In our plan, we identified specific areas where we needed to proactively transform how we worked and embed action that would support inclusion, transfer power and create opportunities for all communities across Sheffield.

Based on consultation across our organisation and the wider Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), we identified the following outcomes:

- More people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are actively involved in and influence leadership and decisions in VAS and the city.

- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations can access the services they need to grow and develop.
- The Voluntary and Community Sector engages more effectively with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations and communities.
- Volunteers, including trustees and people in leadership roles, are representative of all people in Sheffield
- A wide set of communities/ organisations/ individuals are actively engaged to secure funding, build capacity in decision shaping, and foster relationships
- VAS staff have a high level of confidence to talk about race equality and white privilege in the workplace and beyond
- We utilise communications and campaigns to call to action specific statutory and civic institutions to engage with and dismantle structural inequalities.

In June 2021, we published our priorities and commitment to action in a Statement of Intent on our website. The document outlined our commitment to embed positive actions and shift culture, to reverse negative experiences for the people within our organisation and the wider VCS. Our statement and plan also recognised the responsibility we have in VAS to advocate for change in other organisations across Sheffield that are complicit in reinforcing prejudices and creating barriers to opportunities.

VAS services and structure - What has changed because of our Anti-Racism Action Plan?

We have identified a range of actions across our services and programmes, working with the wider VCS and across City institutions and governance structures where we have influence and opportunity to make progress.

We are driving a change in approach across three behaviours:

- Analysing and being conscious and deliberate about who we work with.
- Addressing how we work with groups to learn about and implement anti-racist practices.
- Using our influence to open doors to decision makers for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups we work with (whilst recognising when we need to move out of their way).

"I've seen VAS recognise that it needed to do much more to broaden engagement in the city and be more inclusive - and then take quite rapid action to address this. I think we need to highlight that there has been positive action, not just words"

Kay Dickinson, VAS Trustee, October 2021

Outcomes

We have worked towards the key aims in our plan and the following provides an overview of where we have delivered change and impact in 2021-22:

1. More people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are actively involved in and influence leadership and decisions in VAS and the city.

VAS has recruited new trustees to bring greater breadth to our own board and greater diversity of lived experience and thinking to our own strategy development and decision-making. We welcomed Safiya Saeed from ReachUp Youth in Burngreave and David Bussue from Sheffield African-Caribbean Mental Health Association (SACMHA) to our Board in Autumn 2020 and their contribution and perspective on both their own experiences in the sector as black leaders in the VCS, and as citizens of Sheffield have challenged and shaped our understanding and strategy.

We are supporting more proactive engagement with leaders from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community in the City's governance structures; providing support to members of the Sheffield City Partnership Board; and connecting the Sheffield VCS Leaders group and other Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community leaders with key decision-makers from the statutory system.

"One of the strongest challenges on the Healthy Holidays steering group was from Safiya Saeed, when she described how much further the programme needed to reach, she described the impact of COVID on young people in the Somali community; we weren't reaching them, but she could".

Helen Sims, CEO, VAS

We are highlighting issues specific to distinct Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in the networks we facilitate and partnerships we influence. VAS support the Sheffield VCS Leaders forum, and in this space discussions about priority areas like health inequalities, social care and poverty are enabling more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders to shape understanding of need and articulate opportunities to address some embedded challenges that acutely affect their communities through direct exchanges and sharing of ideas.

We have engaged with decision makers from Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Health and Care Partnership and other key system leaders

Diversifying membership of our networks and groups has led to more connections between VCS organisations that include specific Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders, shifting the narrative about the value and role of the VCS and developing a more nuanced understanding of need. This is being embedded in collective strategic responses around the health commissioning arrangements and the escalation of Sheffield VCS responses to NHS system governance changes in our city and sub-region.

We have received confirmation from a number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations that they are happy for VAS to have a mandate to speak up on their behalf as members of VAS, recognising we have listened and understand their challenges and we have been invited as their 'representative body' to join and sit alongside them at the table with decision makers.

A priority for us is getting out and visiting more organisations as we go into a post COVID world, which enables us to develop a better understanding of what is happening in those community organisations.

"We are challenging [ourselves] first and recognising privilege and [as a result] are embedding inclusion – proactively thinking who is missing rather than who is there".

Teresa Clayton, former Covid hubs Manager, VAS, October 2021

Focus on Healthwatch Sheffield

Healthwatch Sheffield is an independent citizen involvement statutory service, set up by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear citizen voices and use feedback to improve care. Voluntary Action Sheffield delivers the service, with a dedicated team of staff and volunteers.

In March 2021, Healthwatch published its new 3-year strategy that focuses on health equity, and commits to directing more of its resource to supporting the voices of individuals and groups experiencing poorer health outcomes.

One of the Healthwatch areas of focus last year was on the experience of Black and Asian Women in maternity services. Our focus was compelled largely by national statistics relating to starkly higher mortality rates for Black and Asian women in pregnancy and childbirth, but set in the local context of maternity services that have been rated inadequate by the Care Quality Commission.

The Healthwatch team has also looked at representation and involvement across all its work, and worked to fill gaps in existing intelligence on some subjects. We recognised that previous work on homecare did not explore the experience of diverse communities, leading to a piece of work with Sheffield African-Caribbean Mental Health Association (SACMHA) to explore experiences in the African-Caribbean community. Using our involvement in the Council's work programme around Homecare, we were able to link the work with commissioners who have developed an action plan based on the findings. SACMHA are now communicating directly with commissioners about what this will look like and shaping their approach.

Increasingly the Healthwatch focus is to offer our resource and capacity to support work that is important to communities (for example through our community partners, or our Speak Up Grants). We are using our influence and knowledge to connect to decision makers and introduce new insight into relevant work, but then step aside to allow direct relationships to form.

Case Study

Internal action plan launched September 2020

"There is a conundrum around having capacity to be actively engaged in emerging partnerships and invest in bid writing and service development – many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations cannot afford to invest in income generation given the commensurate risk of being unsuccessful. This perpetuates the more dominant position of better-established, very often white led organisations."

VAS submission to the Race Equality Commission, September 2020

During the COVID pandemic, VAS set up and chaired the VCS Employment and Skills group. We invited representatives from across the VCS and started working to support these leaders, together with commissioners in Sheffield City Council, to shape understanding of commissioning needs and agree effective ways to address the employment needs of different communities.

In June 2021, we supported a more embedded partnership bid for Employment and Skills support through the Community Renewal Fund. This approach has included more leaders of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations in directly shaping the bid and creating a future potential delivery model through collaborative workshops. Of the 10 VCS organisations who attended, 5 were Black led, and of those, 3 were very small community groups engaging in this type of process for the first time.

Our bid was ultimately unsuccessful in this round, but this collaboration was key and the conversations and co-design of services is work we will come back to and use to leverage future funding. Through development of new relationships and as trust is embedded, we have built a foundation for future success.

"We have a willingness to be challenged and questioned at all levels, taking time to make change meaningful – both within VAS and in the sector, but clearly more work is needed and some big conversations are needed with statutory organisations"

Sara Hill, VAS Trustee, October 2021

Our journey continues

We have described how we have been part of a working group to develop a brief for how the city might achieve better diversity and representation on boards and decision-making bodies. The Race Equality Commission endorsed this approach and the 25 by 25 campaign was highlighted in their report. We will support the development of a steering group around this work and seek funding to take it forward in whatever organisation is best placed to host the city campaign.

We also recognise the role we play in leadership support into Trustee roles. Our work with the New Beginnings team and the Volunteer Centre will focus on developing support mechanisms for people to start their journey toward a Trustee role, including shadow board roles, buddy and mentoring.

A key role for VAS is leadership of the VCS sector and through our VCS leaders forum we are developing a collective statement of intent and rapid action plan, that will be published in the autumn of 2022.

2. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations can access the services they need to grow and develop.

At the end of 2020, we secured Lottery COVID crisis funding to pilot outreach and engagement in the sector and utilised funding to second an experienced community leader to lead on engagement and equality in VAS. We recognised that we needed to reach out as part of our pandemic response and start building new networks to support both the crisis response and the joint work of designing our recovery. Having piloted this dedicated role, the feedback was positive and in 2021, we structured our team to make this a substantive post, embedding the role in our VCS support team; reporting directly to the Chief Executive officer.

Our Equality and Engagement Lead, Pam Daniel has been in post since 2020 and comes to this role with lived experience of racism and a background working for and with smaller community organisations.

Feedback from the people we work with has shown us that the impact of building trust for individuals and leaders is enabling them not only to engage with the services and support VAS offers, but also to start a dialogue with other institutions in the city where trust has previously been lost. This will be a long journey for many individuals as we face the impact of over 10 years of growing competition for funding and deepening inequality, but we will continue to build networks and support safe and inclusive spaces, such as the VCS leaders' forum and weekly VCS network meetings.

"It has made such a huge difference seeing someone that looks like me at VAS. Your sympathetic approach has made me feel I can be honest and open and share my concerns. I feel supported; when in the past I have felt discriminated against."

Female VCS organisation leader

One-to-one mentoring delivered by Pam Daniel, Equality and Engagement Lead, to volunteers and staff from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities has also made an impact in supporting potential future VCS leaders in the city. People are feeding back that they feel better supported, and are reporting a positive impact on their confidence and personal wellbeing, because of feeling less isolated.

Mentoring and 1:1 support has had a particular impact when it comes to women of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities. We have had lots of feedback that women feel intimidated not just by the racism they experience and see in society but also that within their communities, men can dominate the leadership arena and they feel undervalued or pushed out. Women in the sector have been particularly underserved by us, and their isolation has resulted in a lack of confidence and not recognising their own capabilities, as we, and other institutions in the city have failed to see them.

Our journey continues

- The role Pam Daniel, Equality and Engagement lead, plays continues to support people 1:1, with regular check-ins and connections made both to VAS services and between VCS staff and volunteers. Pam Daniel has also taken on the chair of the weekly VCS hubs meetings, with a specific remit to engage new and diverse attendees and members of the network. On our weekly call we bring a wide range of statutory system partners in to our space, to provide briefings and updates and keep the network informed, which is now becoming vital as the Cost of Living Crisis response is coordinated.
- The CEO and Director of Strategic Partnerships have regular check-in calls and meetings with leaders from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Our regular briefings enable us to share information about what VAS have been working on, Statutory system updates and opportunities and to listen to insight and intelligence from communities.

Our development team have been working with our partners South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau, to hold regular surgeries in communities, to increase opportunities for VCS groups and leaders to access our support in their communities.

3. The Voluntary and Community Sector engages more effectively with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations and communities.

"I've seen the start of a shift in how VAS are seen externally. People are starting to trust us more, feel more heard, and have seen positive actions and responses. Within VAS, real efforts have made to embed actions on anti-racism in our day-to-day work. It is at the forefront of our daily thinking. As a person of colour, within VAS, I feel heard". Pam Daniel, Equality and Engagement Lead, VAS October 2021

Re-thinking our approach to collaboration

We have redesigned the way that we engage community organisations. We piloted a different approach in the Move More Empowering Communities programme. As a result have extended the reach to another 15 organisations that are primarily working with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. This is allowing some embedded and focussed work with a number of communities including the Yemeni, Somali, Roma and African Women's groups.

We have secured £50,000 of Lottery funding to support better partnership arrangements between the VCS, NHS and Council partners to address barriers to the groups of people suffering the highest levels of Type 2 Diabetes over a 12-month period. This collaborative project seeks to research and identify culturally competent approaches to make a lasting impact in communities with high rates of diabetes. The project engages and benefits the African Caribbean, Somali, Yemeni, Arabic, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Roma Slovak communities in Sheffield (focussing on those areas with the highest prevalence of diabetes).

Pooling the expertise from those with lived-experience, embedded community-led organisations and current service deliverers, learning from the project will be shared across partners committed to a shared strategic ambition to reduce health inequalities in the city. We have secured a further £450,000 to develop this partnership. The funder's feedback included reflections that our partnership was successful on the basis of the range of leaders from affected Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities directly engaged and shaping this work.

We are developing stronger links between the VCS and Statutory system to support Sheffield's Autistic community. We are connecting organisations in racially marginalised communities to better connect in the needs of Autistic people in those communities. Our work is led and shaped by Autistic people who have created the Sheffield Autism Partnership Network, which currently has 77 diverse members, all interested in reciprocal working to support the Autism communities of Sheffield.

Our journey continues

- We have been successful in our bid for the Lottery Diabetes Partnership and will build on our pilot to strengthen and develop our partnership and deliver real impact in communities.
- The Sheffield Autism Partnership Network goes from strength to strength, with 77 Autistic individuals and Autism specific VCS organisations engaged to influence and support all six priority areas of the Government's National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026.
- We are developing our approach to commissioning and prioritise projects that start with community insight and voice. This is a key focus for us and we are investing development time in getting collaborative conversations embedded in all we do.

4. Volunteers are representative of all people in Sheffield including trustee & leadership roles

We know from direct experience and the NCVO Diversity and Volunteering report 2020 that there are significant barriers to volunteering for people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, particularly those on lower incomes, and those wanting to volunteer with charities outside of their ethnic and faith community.

The Volunteer Centre actively promotes inclusive volunteering and supporting charities to diversify volunteers is a core part of our work. We quality check all roles and use this process to support organisations to create inclusive opportunities through 1-1 support, monthly networking meetings and online resources. Approximately 200 charities advertise volunteer roles via our platforms.

Through the Volunteer Co-ordinators forum, we asked charities how they were supporting volunteers to improve their racial literacy and set up a working group to look at ideas and resources. We shared the online resources and ideas (e.g. anti-racist book groups) that partners had found useful within the network and acknowledged that capacity and funding was limiting this work.

During COVID our face to face services for volunteers stopped and we set up a virtual drop in service to continue to offer telephone and email support to people less confident finding roles themselves. 34% of our support delivery was to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals.

The New Beginnings Project at VAS supports refugees to access volunteering. This team employs a number of staff with lived experience to support individuals to access volunteering, employment and community learning, and develop leadership through a participation group. Refugee and asylum seekers are involved as volunteers delivering and improving this service.

The impact of COVID on inclusive volunteering has been huge. For example, more charities are advertising roles needing highly skilled volunteers to deliver a service with minimal training because their capacity has been stretched by demand, services are changing, and remote working can make it harder to train volunteers.

This year the New Beginnings team are focussing on re-designing internal opportunities to create a pathway for refugees to develop the skills to volunteer in mainstream charities. We will also develop resources with refugees and asylum seekers to raise awareness of trustee roles and the benefits and barriers associated with becoming a trustee.

5. A wide set of communities/ organisations / individuals are actively engaged to:

- secure funding,
- build capacity in decision shaping
- foster relationships, recognising a diverse set of needs/ not one homogenous / monolithic group.

We have set out in this report many of the different ways in which we have focussed existing programmes and designed new ones to ensure that funding and support is delivered more effectively to organisations and leaders from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

A good example of opening up and targeting support in a large funded programme in the city is Sheffield Healthy Holidays, which is outlined below:

"I'm making a conscious effort to include diversity and racial awareness in all my meetings with providers of the Healthy Holidays programme".

Shakila Sharif, HAF Coordinator, VAS

Focus on improving diversity in shaping and delivering Sheffield Healthy Holidays (Funded by the Department of Education, Holiday Activities and Food Programme)

We listened and learned from the feedback from community leaders about our coordination of delivery of the Healthy Holidays programme in 2020.

We shared an independent evaluation of the programme in December 2020 with partners and stakeholders, which reported that 50% of the 6000 plus children reached with support were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, but simultaneously highlighted the shortcomings of the programme. The evaluation made the clear recommendation that "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations should be involved in programme design and as partners from the outset, playing a key role in decisions about the model of delivery".

In 2021, we worked alongside Council colleagues as members of the HAF partnership to ensure that the learning from 2020 was addressed. We ensured that representation at the programme partnership board reflected a wider diversity of communities through inviting key community representatives onto the board, and transferred power to capable, expert community and youth leaders to shape and influence the summer delivery.

We deployed our Engagement and Equality lead and our food coordinator to the programme to support capacity and building on the connections we had already made across a network of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic led organisations, we supported the Council to take forward delivery in 2021, ensuring more direct funding and representation in delivery arrangements.

We were delighted that ReachUp Youth, Ellesmere Youth and Fir Vale Hub were appointed joint locality leads for the delivery in the Burngreave, Fir Vale and Firth Park area, and brought their insight, energy and connections to bring new providers on board to deliver over the Summer.

The number of children reached through delivery in 2021 was in excess of 11,000 and we are confident in the model of community representation and leadership and would like to support its replication in future delivery in the city.

Through our New Beginnings project, we supported 70 refugee and asylum seeker families who were not connected to local groups to access the project.

We have supported the capacity of communities to engage with the programme and have listened to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders about the approach required for groups to access the right support. We designed learning and workforce development support to meet those needs that has included peer/ informal mentoring working alongside groups to complement access to the formal training programme.

We have also listened to youth organisations in underserved communities and are driving activity to develop leadership opportunities for young people in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations to extend the HAF programme impact beyond short term funding and delivery, into Youth leadership development for the future.

VAS have made real improvements in the last year- the team have done really well to address some of the issues we were raising and I'm confident that they will do more to take this work forward, because there is still more to do.

Abdul Shaif, CEO, ACT, Speaking at VCS Laders forum in April 2022

6. VAS staff have a high level of confidence to talk about race equality and white privilege in the workplace and beyond

"The safe space for non-white staff has been implemented and we are engaged – Senior Managers have listened to feedback on the ethnic pay gap from this group".

Annalisa Toccara, Communications Manager, VAS

In May 2021, we engaged Dr Muna Abdi in delivering a series of Racial Literacy workshops for all VAS staff, trustees and volunteers. It was important to us that all our people had the opportunity to explore in an in depth session, a full range of terminology, history and meaning behind terms such as racism, privilege, allyship.

Whilst everyone had the opportunity to engage in the workshop, it was clear from the feedback (a sample of which is outlined below) that there was a range of starting points and that individual journeys were very different. We recognised that we would need to follow up this session with further less formal staff engagement but have struggled to create safe spaces online. As COVID restrictions are lifted and we can come together face to face, we will be holding values-based conversations and the opportunity to share experiences.

Within VAS there has been a high level of engagement with staff and trustees. The level of awareness and involvement was reviewed positively at our annual review meeting in October 2021, 100% of attendees polled were aware of the outcomes in the action plan, with over 60% currently actively involved in developing action, but sustaining and building on this will require long-term investment.

We recognise that our design and support of literacy requires development, but we have seen a positive culture of openness and challenge start to develop in our race equality working group meetings. All staff are invited to every race action meeting and the focus will vary in each meeting from action planning through to updates on race issues in the city, always with a level of open discussion. There is a good level of debate and participation developing, but the development of our organisational culture is critical to the success of our plans.

7. Utilise communications and campaigns to call to action specific system players and bodies to engage with and dismantle structural inequalities.

"We are delivering real change within VAS and developing our confidence to call to action and challenge the wider VCS to anti-racism action. What holds us back is the concern that our action is seen as performative, or tokenistic; we are only at the start of our own journey, so who are we to publicly challenge others?"

Helen Sims, CEO, VAS

What we can and are doing is leveraging action in spaces where we have influence.

We are members of the South Yorkshire funders' forum, which is a regular network of funders of all sizes from the National Lottery to local Town Trusts, chaired by our partners South Yorkshire Community Foundation, to look at how we support post-Covid recovery, with a specific focus on tackling inequality of funding.

Within the forum, our engagement and equality lead has shared her own personal story of racism, her experience within the sector and has introduced speakers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to this space.

The forum is changing the way funders collaborate, promoting understanding of the issue and changing the way they assess funding need. The forum has recently commissioned (with funding from the National Lottery) short films from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community VCS organisations, as a way of raising their profile and making a funding ask, without the need for a form.

We support the Sheffield VCS leaders' forum and were able to secure Professor Kevin Hylton (Chair of the Sheffield Race Equality Commission) to come and speak to leaders about some early findings. We have subsequently agreed that anti-racism action is one of the forum's three key priorities for 2022, and in July 2022 we are holding a special workshop to reflect on the recommendations of the commission and develop our own joint statement of intent and shared action plan.

Finally, this report and our commitment to publish a regular update on our work to become anti-racist is a call to action in itself. We will be honest and open in our narrative and continue to share our learning in this way and by talking about the structural inequalities we are tackling, we will continue to demonstrate action rather than words.

"I've seen some organisations starting to move towards more inclusive practices within the VCS. For example, more accessible funding opportunities that move away from traditional means e.g. long question and answer to video submissions"

Lewis Bowman, Health and Wellbeing Manager, VAS

Our learning

Key highlights from our work so far

- The key roles deployed and our concerted effort around engagement/ listening have been pivotal in our education and understanding of how we tackle racism and influence system change
- Our ways of working have changed, our conversations have changed, our culture is positively changing to become more open to challenge and debate. As we understand more, we discover complexity, tension between communities and intersectionality that will take time and focus to work through; our journey is just beginning
- Within VAS there has been a high level of engagement with staff and trustees with this plan and work.
- A safe space for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff has been created and owned by staff in VAS. The group set their own aims and agreed the terms and frequency of their meetings. The group have given positive feedback about the importance of this space and have given helpful insight and challenge to our action.
- Our networks have grown and are stronger. VCS Leaders forum is a strong example of re-designing a network for inclusivity, and creating a safe space to share, understand and agree clear priorities. The network has grown to 32 individual members who reflect many of Sheffield's communities.

What we've learned

- We have assumed far too much, about what people understand and know about VAS. We need to continue to invest in engagement, inclusion and communications capacity and skills in the organisation to strengthen relationships.
- We did not realise our power. We have assumed everyone has the same access to information and opportunities. This is not the case and our ability to develop equity in our impact needs to be led by feedback from community organisations from underserved communities; this is our benchmark.
- We need to be transparent about the different roles we play as an organisation, for example, where we are an accountable body, where we are a convener, where we are facilitating, and ensure these roles have boundaries and are understood.
- Sometimes the best thing we can do is to move out of the way. We cannot and shouldn't do everything we are asked, but what we do needs to be inclusive, accessible and relevant.
- We have learned that diverse communities have nuanced experiences of the city and this creates tensions between people and organisations that is hard to navigate; this is where our education and development is key.

- We will not always get it right – so describing failure and learning is vital, and we need to be brave in our approach to transparency and support others to do the same. We need to face up to criticism, hear lived experience and take action.
- Diversity of lived experience and thinking is powerful and essential if we want to do different things and get different outcomes for communities.
- We need an external independent reference point for our work, to assess our progress and impact on this journey. We have dedicated time into the initial action plan and our current priorities, but we need challenge and scrutiny to stay focussed on the right things.
- We need to get better at measuring impact in this space.

Our journey continues

VAS is committed to ensuring that momentum continues and that we learn and grow; even if we don't always get things right, we will continue to push forward to address complex community challenges, and instigate and support the uncomfortable conversations that must precede change.

We have identified a need for external accountability and the importance of measuring progress made, to continuously check if we are going far enough and fast enough and keeping our focus where it needs to be. Part of our measurement requires data and insight to be collected consistently within VAS and we are developing our IT strategy and data collection systems to enable the right balance of knowledge. In Appendix A we outline the current data set we collect to support our understanding of equal opportunities in our staff recruitment and reward and delivery of key services.

We will engage with, support the findings of and support the Race Equality Commission and its legacy work/ legacy organisation to bring external scrutiny to our work.

We continue to look at our own organisation and work to build trust and confidence in our activities. We are also conscious of the need to model anti-racist values in the way that we recruit, create opportunities for progression within our organisation and ensure that diverse perspectives and understanding shape our organisational decision-making and oversight structures.

At our review of our action plan in October 2021, we collectively agreed the following focus for 2022-23:

Transparency, campaigns and communications

Key actions:

- To publish this Review of Race Action in Autumn 2022 and embed this report alongside our annual accounts and annual impact report. To present this as part of core organisational documents at our AGM in October.
- Work with VCS leaders at a special forum workshop in July 2022 to agree a collective statement of intent and joint action plan to support the findings of the Race Equality Commission.
- Work with other VCS infrastructure organisations as part of the NAVCA race- action-working group, to share best practice about approaches, tools and support for race equality and inclusion.

Racial literacy

Key actions:

- Develop a shared set of values – create an understanding of what we want as an organisation, providing some kind of “terms of reference” for people.
- Understand what people need to progress their racial literacy journey – look at the training evaluation as a starting point, develop different “safe” spaces for people to talk about or communicate what they need or want to know more about/explore in more detail. Line Managers are key to communicating and may need spaces like Survey Monkey if people do not feel comfortable talking directly about their needs.
- We have agreed that smaller group discussions should be a core to future race-action meetings to provide the safe spaces to explore our language and understanding.
- Agree a mechanism of communicating anti-racism action across the whole organisation that goes beyond project updates and allows everyone to understand outcomes, see progress and feel part of it. Give everyone ownership.

Race and Governance

Key actions:

We have described how we have been part of a working group to develop a brief for how the city might achieve better diversity and representation on boards and decision-making bodies. The Race Equality Commission endorses this approach and the 25 by 25 campaign. We will support the development of a steering group around this work and seek funding to take it forward in whatever organisation is best placed to host it.

Recruitment and progression

Key actions:

Stage 1 Recruitment

To update our recruitment practice and procedures:

- Allow more time for the recruitment process to build in inclusive approaches
- Support awareness of the need for language checking at the initial phase of recruitment, i.e. the job description (a guide on language with some template examples will be produced for staff)
- Make job adverts clear, simple and state terms and conditions/ pay on all adverts. Consider the use of inclusive images and target diverse networks to share adverts to get wider reach
- Wherever possible, provide an opportunity for people to ‘meet the team’, whether this is in person or online
- Look for placement and progression opportunities within VAS
- Simplify application forms and try and score against fewer points of the person specification, and make this process more transparent (i.e. explain the scoring system to applicants)
- Provide time to talk to potential candidates and offer support to complete the application form (whether this be one-to-one or in group preparatory sessions)

- Give more upfront information regarding the interview process (the structure, running order and panel), give a brief introduction to the building and what to expect when you arrive, and give people the opportunity to say if they need any adjustments made.

- Review induction process for inclusion and see induction as an enabler of success in the role

Data and measures

In Appendix A we set out some of the equality data we have measured over the past 2 years. Like the key theme of the Race Equality Commission report, we recognise we need better data to enable us to understand our impact in becoming an anti-racist organisation. A key objective for us going forward is to develop a more robust set of data to help us understand our impact in all areas of this work.

Insight

We recognise that real progress is not just measured in the quantity of things that are in an action plan, but also in the way that things are done and our way of working. We will continue to actively engage in all our communities, to seek and listen to feedback and act upon that insight, as well as hold ourselves up to public scrutiny, in partnership with the Race equality Commission legacy organisation.

We will engage with, support the findings of and support the Race Equality Commission and its legacy work/ legacy organisation to bring external scrutiny to our work.

We continue to look at our own organisation and work to build trust and confidence in our activities. We are also conscious of the need to model anti-racist values in the way that we recruit, create opportunities for progression within our organisation and ensure that diverse perspectives and understanding shape our organisational decision-making and oversight structures.

At our review of our action plan in October 2021, we collectively agreed the following focus for 2022-23:

Transparency, campaigns and communications

Key actions:

- To publish this Review of Race Action in Autumn 2022 and embed this report alongside our annual accounts and annual impact report. To present this as part of core organisational documents at our AGM in October.
- Work with VCS leaders at a special forum workshop in July 2022 to agree a collective statement of intent and joint action plan to support the findings of the Race Equality Commission.
- Work with other VCS infrastructure organisations as part of the NAVCA race- action-working group, to share best practice about approaches, tools and support for race equality and inclusion.

Appendix- VAS equality data

We are developing how and when we collect data to support measurement of our equality outcomes. Currently we have two focus areas:

1. Our People

Staff pay

In May 2021, we calculated the rates of pay across all staff based on their ethnicity (as declared on their equal opportunities form). To establish if we had an ethnic pay gap, we used a very basic calculation to compare average salary of white staff with the average salary of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff.

In May 2021 the difference in average salary was as follows:

- Average salary across white staff £27,468 annually or £15.09 per hour
- Average salary across Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff £24,301 annually or £13.35 per hour

A difference or gap of £3,167 annually or £1.74 per hour.

In May 2022 we carried out the same calculation to establish if we had closed the gap.

Further to a pay award in April 2022, recruitment and the commencement of a senior management team restructure, the average salary across all staff is £26,467 annually or £14.54 per hour

- Average salary across white staff £26,337 annually or £14.47 per hour
- Average salary across Black Asian and Minority Ethnic staff £26,809 annually or £14.73 per hour

Our data indicates that our pay gap has closed. Looking behind the figures, this change can be attributed to high staff turnover, leading to recruitment, where we have piloted more inclusive recruitment practices. It has also been quite a transitional year and has allowed creation of development opportunities for staff within VAS (interim arrangements at CEO level created acting up opportunities for two staff, which we have now embedded on a permanent basis).

We recognise as a small organisation, this is a sensitive tool to use (a relatively small change to staff grading can make a big difference to averages), but by looking at this indicator on an annual basis, supports our conscious consideration of pay and reward.

Staff pay grades

The pay grade table provides detail behind the average salaries as it breaks down the ethnicity of staff by pay grade:

	Total number white staff	Total number Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority staff
Grade 1	1	1
Grade 2	8	0
Grade 3	9	8
Grade 4	5	4
Grade 5	3	0
Grade 6	6	1
Grade 7	1	0
Grade 8 (CEO)	1	0
Total	34	14

Recruitment

Since May 2021 we have recruited 13 new staff, of our new recruits, 6 people are from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities.

Our recruitment process includes an equal opportunities monitoring form at application stage, however the completion of this form is optional and candidates can fill all, part or none of the form in. This is our current means to establish data on who is applying for VAS jobs.

The data recorded in the preceding 2 years is as follows:

Recruitment period: May 2019 – April 2020

Equal opportunities forms returned = 55
Applicants identified as White = 45
Applicants identifying as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic = 10

Recruitment period: May 2020 – April 2021

Equal opportunities forms returned = 13
Applicants identified as White = 8
Applicants identifying as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic = 5

Last year's recruitment period: May 2021 – April 2022

Equal opportunities forms returned = 32
Applicants identified as White = 23
Applicants identifying as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic = 9

This data does not show who was interested in the post, only those who submitted an application form and completed their equal opportunities form.

2. Our services

Volunteer Centre

Volunteers registered through the standard platform on our website:

Dataset	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Volunteers Registered	1324	1002	858
Gender	# Volunteers	# Volunteers	# Volunteers
(Not Specified)	303	255	236
Female	695	514	440
Gender Not Disclosed	10	8	0
Male	315	225	180
Transgender	1		2

Dataset	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Ethnicity	# Volunteers	# Volunteers	# Volunteers
Not Specified	491	440	395
Any other	17	14	15
Asian or Asian British- Any other Asian Background	16	14	20
Asian or Asian British-Bangladeshi	3	3	2
Asian or Asian British-Indian	21	9	19
Asian or Asian British-Pakistani	24	19	20
Black or Black British-African	28	26	1
Black or Black British- Any other background	5	1	1
Black or Black British-Caribbean	6	11	2
Chinese	31	11	14
Mixed-Any Other Mixed Background	4	9	8
Mixed- White and Asian	11	13	7
Mixed- White and Black African	5	1	2
Mixed- White and Black Caribbean	6	2	0
Prefer Not to Say	12	9	0
White - Any other White background	64	50	43
White British	571	372	302
White Irish	3	4	5
Overall White	638	426	350
Overall people of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities	177	125	113

VCS Support Team

In the last year VAS has supported 232 Community groups and organisations in one or more area of operation including volunteer management, measuring impact, governance and managing change.

Of these:

123 were supported with skills to recruit and manage volunteers.

109 were supported with wider organisational support.

Organisational Support

Profile (for groups receiving organisational development support)

Income / Turnover of the groups	Percentage	Governance / Structure of Groups	Percentage
Less than £10K	63%	Unincorporated Association	65%
£10K - £50K	12%	Incorporated Charities	25%
£50K - £100K	5%	CIC or Co. Ltd. by Guarantee	10%
Over £100K	20%		

Groups representing or with an expressed purpose to meet the needs of:	Percentage reported of the total number 109
Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities	31%
People over 60	48%
LGBT	2%
Children or young people under 19	25%
People with disabilities / chronic illness	18%
A particular faith group	2%