

“It’s time to recognise the value of the workforce” with more and better Reflective Support for VCFSE frontline staff & volunteers

Burn-out is what people experience at work when they are physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted. It has become an urgent problem for frontline workers in the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. If left unaddressed, burnout threatens the sector’s ability to provide essential support to people and communities in our city who consistently face poorer outcomes and greater barriers to opportunities.

The emotional demands on VCFSE frontline workers have increased as the levels of crisis and complexity in the city have been rising. This means workers are tired, depleted, and most do not have access to appropriate wellbeing support to help them in their roles.

Reflective Support is a regular, ongoing, protected time commitment which is facilitated by an external expert. It supports the worker to reflect on their role and can contribute to the worker’s professional development. Clinical supervision is one example, as are other types of 1-to-1 support or group work that involve creative or physical activities.

Since June 2024, more than 70 frontline staff and volunteers from 24 VCFSE organisations in Sheffield have been funded to take part in Reflective Support of their choice. This is a summary of what they said.

Key findings

- **Reflective Support is helping**

- Workers report Reflective Support is meeting a need they have
- Organisations have seen a positive difference and are looking for ways to continue it after this funding ends

- **Prioritising self-care is culturally challenging in the VCFSE sector**

- **It takes work to be ready to put Reflective Support in place**

- Having knowledge of Reflective Support makes it easier to put it in place
- Frontline workers have varying knowledge and experience of Reflective Support
- There are also practical barriers to putting this support in place

- **Cultural appropriateness of Reflective Support matters**

- There are many types of Reflective Support
- Different types of provider and provision appeal to different individuals and organisations

- **Better workforce wellbeing positively impacts the sustainability of VCFSE organisations**

- Reflective Support is one part of wider organisational wellbeing
- Investment in workforce wellbeing is long overdue in this sector

Recommendations

For city decision makers

- Recognise and champion the critical role that workforce wellbeing plays in enabling the VCFSE sector to support our city's people and communities

For funders and commissioners

- Account for workforce wellbeing in planning process and investment approach

For trustee boards

- Recognise that better workforce wellbeing positively impacts service delivery and is a key part of effective risk management

For VCFSE organisations

- Include an amount for worker wellbeing within your budget when bidding for funding for future service delivery
- Start, or continue, a conversation with your workers about their wellbeing
- Continue providing or enabling the things workers say have the most impact on their wellbeing at work:
 - Positive, trusting and supportive relationships with co-workers
 - Effective and supportive leadership
 - A proactive and caring organisational approach to worker wellbeing
- Invest in training for senior staff to become Reflective Support providers

For Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS)

- Respond to feedback from participants in this project
- Continue to support upskilling frontline workers as part of VCFSE capacity building
- Continue to advocate for work in the city that reimagines a VCFSE working culture in which self-care is a priority

Further information and resources

Scan the QR code to read or download the full report, or follow this link:

<https://www.vas.org.uk/what-we-do/frontline-worker-wellbeing-reflective-support/>

This project sits within VAS's emerging workstream on worker wellbeing.

For more details, please contact the **VCFSE Partnerships & Development Team** through: info@vas.org.uk

