



Annual Report 2007/2008



From the Chairperson - Helen Thompson

It has been another hectic year at VAS. We celebrated our 75th Anniversary in December 07, which is a great achievement for the organisation and we look forward to the next 75 years. This year we have also started working as an umbrella body for the CRB and shortly we will be the host for LINK (Local Involvement Network). This last year has been tough for the sector for funding as ESF has finished and we will be going into commissioning, we withdrew from WSIC (Wiltshire & Swindon Infrastructure Consortium) and now we lead on the new infrastructure body for Swindon - Empower Swindon.

I would like to thank Chris Lau and all the staff for their hard work this year, we will be losing two valued members of staff - Paul Dixon and Caroline Cooper in June, who have both moved on to new jobs, I wish them good luck for the future and I know they will be missed. We also had 3 members of the Board leaving - Mike Bell and Mike Shawyer with Rosemary Power moving out of Swindon. I would like to thank them for their contributions in the past years. The next year looks exciting for us and I am looking forward to meeting new staff that we will have and the many friends from last year. It has been a privilege to be chair of VAS this last year and looking forward to next year!

Voluntary Action Management Team

Trustees

M Bell

T Charnock

J Hawkins

S Milner

A Nix

T Odoire

R Power

S Sahu - Treasurer

M Shawyer - resigned January 2008

H Thompson - Chairperson

Staff Members

Caroline Cooper - Community Empowerment Manager

Paul Dixon - Funding Advice Worker

Chris Lau - Chief Executive Officer

John Phipps - Training/Trustee Network Development Worker

David Sudworth - Office Administrator

Shanaz Qaddus - Bookkeeper

Voluntary Action Swindon was formed in 1932 as the Swindon Council of Social Service, administering help to the unemployed and disadvantaged. Voluntary Action Swindon has a unique role serving as a mediator between the public sector and the third sector. Voluntary Action Swindon contributes significantly in bringing the diverse sections of our community together, promoting the wider engagement and participation of the third sector in the Swindon Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement.

Our strategic aims for the next three years - 2008 - 2011 are:

- To improve the capacity and quality of third sector organisations
- To facilitate liaison and collaboration within the third sector and between the voluntary, public and private sectors
- To enable third sector organisations to gain greater access to information, practical support services and facilities
- To identify and prioritise the needs of local communities and develop appropriate responses

From the Chief Executive Officer - Chris Lau

This year represented a new challenge for Voluntary Action Swindon, as the approach of infrastructure commissioning, as well as the end of European Social Fund to the Trustee Network, which had been running in the last three years. In 2007/08 we continued to support voluntary and community groups and forge partnerships with the public, voluntary and private sectors. The arrival of the Local Area Agreement brings in a new working relationship for the voluntary and public sector on how to achieve set targets together.

Voluntary Action Swindon had been involved with the Wiltshire & Swindon Infrastructure Consortium (WSIC) for over 4 years since the launch of the Infrastructure Strategy in 2003. The complexity of two separate local authorities in terms of needs and structures and engaging the community, created a huge difference between Swindon and Wiltshire. Following a series of meetings and negotiations with the Government Office for the Southwest (GOSW), CapacityBuilders, Swindon Borough Council and WSIC, Voluntary Action Swindon decided to resign from WSIC in March 2008. With the support of CapacityBuilders and GOSW, a meeting was called and chaired by CapacityBuilders to set up a Swindon Consortium by the end of March 2008. Voluntary Action Swindon has been the accountable body for the Consortium.

A Third Sector Visioning Workshop was held in July 2007 to provide an opportunity for voluntary, community and statutory sector partners to develop a vision for the future of the third sector in Swindon. A further workshop followed in November 2007, attended by a more focused group of major stakeholders from the third sector. As a result to this, the Third Sector Development Strategy has now been written with the aim of highlighting and capitalising on the special contribution which the third sector can make to achieving Swindon's objectives and priorities. A wide consultation will be conducted over the summer.

I believe our creativity and capability will continue to support us in the next decade of Voluntary Action Swindon's development.

Training & Development - John Phipps

Throughout 2007 -2008 Voluntary Action provided training and development support to many groups in a variety of ways.

A training programme of 23 courses was run. These were attended by 195 people. Areas covered included:- finance, first aid and dealing with difficult situations.

Help was also given to some 12 recently formed groups enabling them to set up, run more effectively and where appropriate begin the process of seeking charitable status. Development support has also been provided to 10 groups on governance issues or wanting to make changes to their structure.

Voluntary Action has co-ordinated the quarterly PQASSO support group meetings, provided workbooks and CDs and mentoring support to 4 groups in the process of implementing PQASSO. There are plans to extend this service by providing peer review assessment in 2008.

Voluntary Action continued to co-ordinate and support the Black Minority Ethnic Forum during the year. Voluntary Action also maintained links with the Parks, Penhill and Central Learning Groups. In addition to the annual training programme, several trustee training sessions for black and minority ethnic groups were held.

Funding Advice & Development - Paul Dixon

This year has seen the funding climate become more difficult both nationally and locally. Groups are finding it harder to access funding and have to be more creative in their fundraising. They now have to look to other sources and think about how they can generate their own funds. This funding squeeze has been particularly noticeable in Swindon with the end of projects that were funded by the European Social Fund. The Local Network Fund which was managed by the Community Foundation also came to an end and this will be a loss to the many small groups working with children. Two organisations that we have worked with recently, Project Spear and the Welcome Centre decided to close and others have had to scale down projects.

On a positive note I have worked with the Heritage Lottery Fund to promote their grants to groups in Swindon. This is because there has previously been limited success from groups in the town. We ran a briefing session in February with follow up sessions for individual groups. Hopefully we can get some good applications produced in the coming year. The council launched their grassroots grants scheme this year open to small groups and a number of groups have come to us for advice on setting up and getting their group organised.

Swindon Borough Council reorganised its community team this year which has meant a different focus to their work. We lost the use of the Grantfinder software due to increasing costs; however groups still have access to a range of information at Voluntary Action, including Funderfinder, DSC Directories, our website and email newsletters. I have continued to support the community development network which links with the council community workers, however only time will tell whether this group will continue. The BME Forum did not take off as we originally hoped it would and attendance by groups has been limited. What is needed is a more coordinated approach to working with individual groups so that they can benefit from intensive work with their committees to build their capacity.

I continued to be involved in GEORGE, the South West Funding Advisors Network and we received some Capacity Builders funding from their infrastructure group to run two training sessions, on accounting and full cost recovery. In the coming year groups should be able to access a new South West funding database which will go live soon.

Finally I will be leaving Voluntary Action Swindon at the end of June 2008; I would like to wish everyone involved in the work every success in the future.

Swindon Trustee Network - John Phipps

The Swindon Trustee Network has continued to flourish through the lively bimonthly meetings. These have enabled members to share ideas and information and raise issues amongst themselves and with invited guests.

In response to issues raised at a Trustee Network day a series of half days on financial reporting and profile raising were held during July. Six free of charge Human Resources half day seminars were also held between May 2007 and January 2008.

Funding to support the Network ended in March 2008. Voluntary Action has decided to support the continuation of quarterly Network meetings for the coming year.

A second Trustee Network Open Day is planned for 21st October 2008.

Community Empowerment - Caroline Cooper

Stronger Communities Forum

The Stronger Communities Forum continues to be well attended, averaging around 50 people a time representing a wide range of statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations. This year there have been three Forum events in July, November and March during which there were presentations and discussion on the Shared Vision for Swindon 2008-2030, rural issues, consultation good practice, the new Local Area Agreement and celebrating Swindon's successes.

Volunteering Policy

There has been some delay with the adoption of this Policy due to the complexity of Borough Council processes. It was taken to Operations Board at the beginning of March and was given full approval. It was recommended by the Board that the Policy be taken directly to Human Resources to facilitate roll-out to all managers working with volunteers. It is expected that this will take place over summer 2008.

Community Empowerment Network

Due to lack of funding and resources, it was agreed at the beginning of this period that it was not possible to develop a community empowerment network in the form proposed. Successful networks are generally fully staffed and have received £100k plus to facilitate their work – unfortunately, this is not the case in Swindon.

Rather than abandoning the concept of a community empowerment network for Swindon entirely, the scope was reduced to a website which I designed and developed. www.empowerswindon.co.uk went live in November 2007 and includes information on how to get involved in decisions that affect local people and is updated monthly with opportunities for involvement. The website has averaged around 80 visits a month with a peak of almost 300 in January due to Get Volunteering Swindon!

Get Volunteering Swindon!

There was a week of celebration and raising awareness of volunteering in Swindon Borough with the main objective of addressing the shortfall in Local Area Agreement indicators 11.3 and 12.3; residents confirming that have taken part in volunteering in the last 12 months. I conducted initial discussions with various colleagues and secured Volunteer Centre Swindon, Swindon Borough Council, Voluntary Action Swindon, Community Radio Swindon, Active Swindon, and BBC Radio Swindon as partners in the initiative. Following a launch in the town centre there were many activities across the borough including the Volunteering Opportunities Bus, A Rowdy Night Out local band night fundraiser, stands in shopping centres, a photographic exhibition by residents of the Foyer and a reception for volunteers of Swindon Borough Council.

The week was deemed a success with extensive local media coverage through newspapers, radio and websites. In the month of January, Volunteer Centre Swindon experienced a 20% increase in the number of enquiries they received about volunteering opportunities.

Financial Report 2007/08

	Unrestricted	Restricted	2008	2007
Incoming Resources				
Charitable Activities				
Donations	374	-	374	311
Grants receivable	-	108,832	108,832	113,056
Community print	16,342	-	16,342	16,572
Training/Conference	8,398	-	8,398	16,136
Generated Funds				
Rental income	26,781	-	26,781	24,811
Other income	3,083	2,710	5,793	7,185
Bank interest	8,836	407	9,243	7,350
Total incoming resources	63,814	111,949	175,763	185,421
Resources expended				
Charitable Activities				
	38,443	118,084	156,527	157,989
Generated Funds				
	1,877	-	1,877	2,503
Governance Costs				
	8,542	304	8,846	7,352
Total resources expended	48,862	118,388	167,250	167,844
Transfers between funds	9,916	(9,916)	-	-
Net income for the year/Net movement in funds	24,868	(16,355)	8,513	17,577
Fund balances at 1/4/07	249,906	26,727	276,633	259,056
Fund balances at 31/3/08	274,774	10,372	285,146	276,633
Fixed assets		103,805		108,184
Tangible assets				
Current assets				
Stock	1,250		1,320	
Debtors	1,480		4,707	
Cash and bank	192,392		179,085	
	195,122		185,112	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(13,781)		(16,663)	
Net current assets		181,341		168,449
Total assets less current liabilities		285,146		276,633
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than 1 year				
Net assets		285,146		276,633
Income Funds				
Unrestricted funds				
General fund		184,774		197,906
Designated fund		90,000		52,000
Restricted funds				
		10,372		26,727
		285,146		276,633

Financial Report 2007/08

Restricted funds	Balance at 1/4/2007	Incoming Resources	Transfers	Balance at 20/3/08
Hawksworth Revenue account	3,349	1,556	(3133)	1,772
Redundancy fund	3,191	-	(3191)	-
Social Care	8,070	1,561	(1,381)	8,250
Lloyds TSB Foundation	9,899	10,685	(20,584)	-
Salisbury CVS	-	500	(500)	-
Swindon Borough Council	-	96,547	(96,547)	-
Mobility Explorer Club	404	-	(404)	-
Compact printing	1,500	300	(1,800)	-
Administrators Network	264	-	(264)	-
Dalmatians	50	800	(500)	350
	26,727	111,949	(128,304)	10,372

Reserves Policy

The Trustees have examined the reserves policy in the light of the predominant risks to the charity. The reserves are required to cover late payment, loss of grant aid funding and other shortfalls of income so as to ensure full and timely delivery of, or appropriate exit from, planned programmes and ongoing provision of services. A policy has been established whereby unrestricted funds, not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets held by the charity, should be four months of running costs. A designated sum of £25,000 has been set aside for the property maintenance fund and a further £45,000 for the operational reserve fund. Owing to the town re-generation Voluntary Action Swindon has to move to a new location within the next two to three years. A designated sum of £20,000 has been set aside for the property fund, which will allow Voluntary Action Swindon to identify new premises and pay for surveyors and architects, when appropriate. Voluntary Action Swindon will continue to build reserves through planned operating surpluses.

Auditor:- Hemant J Patel B.com FCCA
53 Victoria Road, Swindon SN1 3AY

Social Care - Mary Stevens, Chairperson

This year has seen a large increase in the number of requests for help that the Social Care Committee has received, we have had just over a hundred applications for assistance, the majority of which have been initiated by carers in the community, Health Visitors, Mental Health Teams, Child Support Agencies and Carers organisations. Those of you familiar with the work of the Social Care Committee know that the criteria of the trust funds we hold only allow us to help in circumstances for which there is no statutory benefit available, nevertheless we are finding that the requests we are receiving are for what most of us would consider to be the essentials of life rather than a pleasant extra to make life easier. How many of us with experience of bringing up a family, would consider a microwave oven a suitable means of providing a family of five with three children under the age of six, with a cooked meal every day, but the government agencies who give grants think it is!

Not only has there been an increase in the number of applications for help but the level of need is increasing as well, and we are greatly in need of fresh sources of revenue to top up the trust funds which are our main source of income. Many funding agencies will only grant funds to projects set up to alleviate poverty and their criteria does not allow them to support us as we deal with individual cases of hardship, we need to look to organisations who are willing to support families in need to give us their help.

I must pay tribute to the Swindon Lions Club who are represented on our committee for the wonderful contribution they make to the work we do. This year they contributed in over half of the applications we received and spent a total of £4,570 towards providing help. They are quite a small body of people but because of their dedication they raise large sums of money for charitable causes. Without the backing of this dedicated band of people behind us, Social Care would not be able to offer the level of help and support we do.

I must give sincere thanks to all the members of the committee for their hard work over the past year, despite some of the harrowing stories we read on our case papers our meetings continue to be happy ones with the satisfaction of hopefully providing some help to those with distressing problems. We are sorry that Bindoo has had to leave us for pastures new, her contribution to our meetings was always useful and positive and she will be missed, however we look forward to being joined by Mary Lee, Mary has often applied to us for help for her clients in the past and we look forward to making use of her experience and expertise. We still have a vacancy on the committee and would be delighted to hear from anyone with preferably a social work or benefits background who would be willing to give a couple of hours each month to help us come to fully informed decisions. We meet in the morning of the second Tuesday of each month at Moredon and the meeting lasts about an hour and a half, please have a word with Chris at Voluntary Action if you would like to know more.

We also send thanks to Chris and the team at John Street for their backup and support.

SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2007/08

MARY STEVENS	CHAIR
NORMAN SEWELL	VICE CHAIR
BRIDGET ROSS	SECRETARY
JOHN HAMILTON	SWINDON LIONS CLUB
ANGELA TYLER	
BINDOO RATTEN	

