



Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency

Prior to purchasing VC Connect we held data in various different places across the organisation. Individual teams basically kept hold of their own data. Individual projects, could show 'how they were doing', in a limited way, but we couldn't really see the 'bigger picture' across the organisation.

I was also aware that we were probably duplicating a lot of data on these various different systems, which isn't a good use of anyone's time and that there were lots of discrepancies on the data we did hold, which made it difficult to assess which was the most up to date record.

We also didn't have a clear picture on who we were reaching or not reaching? As we didn't hold much information on our service-users. We couldn't easily evidence what difference we were making out there? How are organisations progressing as a result of our interventions? Which service-users are 'repeat business'? How are we directing our resources? We wanted to find a database that would hopefully enable us to do this.

We originally heard about VC Connect through NAVCA's Chief Officers Information Network.

At this time we were also considering other systems including **(ThankQ and Volbase)**.

We decided to purchase VC Connect due to the following reasons,

- VCC looked like it was the easiest to use of all the systems we reviewed
- The fact that it is owned and supported by the sector and also that it is the users (the voluntary sector) that dictate how the system is developed and changes. Customers are consulted on proposed changes, and can directly feed into the development process
- We also liked the fact that it is supported by people who actually use the system on a daily basis and its not just technical support you get, but good practical advice on how to get the most out of the system, by people who actually use the system too, within a voluntary organisation
- There was no need to spend time customising and developing it to meet our needs, it was pretty much available 'off the shelf'
- We liked how the monitoring reports and mailshots functionality were specifically tailored to meet the needs of voluntary organisations and how they work, for example we often have contacts who are attached to many organisations, eg work as a volunteer for one, a paid staff member for another, rather than duplicate contacts, within VC Connect, contacts are

stored just once and you can book them on an event or training course, add your case notes, add them to a mailshot, whatever you need.

The benefits VC Connect has brought to our organisation

We can now easily evidence our outputs and impact and also have a tool which makes evaluating our effectiveness much easier. We now also have a consistent way of recording all our activities and outputs, in one place and can share information across projects, and so it also facilitates more 'joined up' working. For example I can search for an organisation on our system, and see instantly a summary of the work, the outputs and the staff that have worked with them and the time spent with that organisation, across teams.

We can now also easily pull off reports on groups we have worked with and assisted, and identify specific areas where we have given assistance ie funding, governance, legal and best practice.

We also use VC Connect to match hard outputs to our business objectives. VC Connect allows you to map activities and outputs to your over arching objectives, so you can track how you are doing in relation to these, by searching on the objective, eg *Promote and support volunteering and good practice in volunteer management* or *Promote and support effective VCS engagement in strategic planning and partnerships* and counting the number of outputs relating to these objectives.

We're also able to provide a much better service to our service-users, eg when someone rings us with an enquiry, we can call up their record, and see a history of work we have done with them, which mailings they receive, which staff normally work with them, we have a wealth of intelligence which was just not accessible pre-VC Connect.

We now know if we're reaching our target audience, or if we need to make changes to reach out to the people we're not. We've recently started a programme of outreach work to engage more neighbourhood groups.

Another reason we like VC Connect is because of how it works. We can give all our staff access to the database (not just administrators) as restrictions can be put in place to prevent users accidentally deleting data. We don't have to worry about data being accidentally deleted or changed, as we don't give our standard users access to do this, although they can still view and report on everything else.

We have now been using VC Connect for almost a year and I can honestly say it has changed how we work as an organisation for the better. It has brought efficiency savings, (centralising our administrative systems), improved the sharing of information between different parts of the organisation, and allowed us to measure

performance, supported reporting and enabled better communication with the local VCS.

It's also really easy to use, which is a bonus. Since implementing VC Connect, we now have 16 staff using it regularly as part of their every day work and because VC Connect works like a web page and is really easy to find your way around, and our staff have been surprisingly receptive.

As with any new system there have been teething troubles. However, the support team have always been helpful, quick to respond and take time to work through problems/issues with us.

We are currently reviewing our first year of VC Connect and plan to make a number of changes to drop-down options, in response to staff suggestions and to extend use of the system to staff who use it less frequently – including managers!

It has been really helpful to have a member of staff with a good understanding of databases and reporting requirements to oversee the project and support the transition to VC Connect, during the implementation.

Dinah Lane
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