

Claire Stevens, Chief Executive, Voluntary Health Scotland

CLAIRE STEVENS is Chief Executive of Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS), Claire has over 35 years' experience of working in and across Scotland's third and public sectors, in a wide range of executive and non-executive roles concerning homelessness and housing, children and young people, older people, volunteering, active citizenship, health and the arts. Since her appointment to VHS in 2012 Claire has led a programme of change that has seen VHS build a reputation for punching above its weight as Scotland's national network and intermediary for third sector organisations involved in health. VHS works with its members and others to influence policy, address health inequalities and to help people and communities live healthier and fairer lives. Claire is a strong advocate for better engagement between the culture and health sectors, as evidenced by VHS's programme of discussion and policy shaping events, Keeping the Conversation Going, and by her work as Secretary of Arts Culture Health and Wellbeing Scotland. She is a Fellow of the Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations, an Honorary Member of the Faculty of Public Health and an Associate Member of the Royal Society for Public Health. She is a former board member of North Edinburgh Arts Trust. Outside of work she spends as much time as she can developing her own (modest) artistic practice.

'Keeping the Conversation Going: an intermediary's story of collaboration between the health and culture sectors.'

Thank you to A4D for this opportunity to talk about the work we are doing in Scotland to embed and cement relationships and partnership working between the health and arts sectors. VHS is the intermediary body here in Scotland for the voluntary health sector, by which we mean health charities and other voluntary and third sector organisations involved in supporting people's health and wellbeing.

We work with our members and a very wide range of stakeholders to address health inequalities, improve healthcare and help people and communities live healthier and richer lives. We do that by providing a platform for less-heard voices, promoting third sector evidence and approaches and acting as a bridge and a conduit into other sectors. We have a strong policy role so our work means a lot of engagement with the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland and Scotland's regional and national health boards and health and social care partnerships.

For example, we are working very closely with all of these in relation to COVID19, most recently to ensure that marginalised groups such as homeless people, asylum seekers and people with serious mental problems do not get left behind in the roll-out of the vaccine

programme. We are a small resource in terms of staffing – we have the equivalent of four full-time posts – so everything we do is based on external engagement, relationship building and collaboration, and our track record of success is very largely as a result of that. Our membership ranges from large national charities through to very local, community-based health initiatives, and they have always had a good level of understanding about the health creating properties of the arts and have wanted VHS to do as much as possible to promote and develop this agenda.

Arts and health: Our practical work in this area first began via the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Health Inequalities which we have run for the past five years. If you are not familiar with CPGs in the Scottish Parliament, they are similar to the All-Party Parliamentary Groups at Westminster, and the membership comprises both Members of the Scottish Parliament (MPS) and a large number of external stakeholders. In December 2017 we initiated a CPG conversation asking, ‘What can arts and culture do for health inequalities?’ As part of our contribution to the development of a [Culture Strategy for Scotland](#). We were frankly overwhelmed at the positive response that the event generated, with its markedly high attendance of arts practitioners - for the first time - at the CPG, which was very exciting.

Since that CPG meeting VHS has continued to hold regular conferences, seminars and workshops that bring together practitioners and policy makers from across the sectors of health and social care and arts and culture. We call these events ‘Keeping the Conversation Going’ because their overwhelming value has been in bringing people together, facilitating and improving engagement and understanding, and promoting greater collaboration and partnership working.

‘Keeping the Conversation Going’ led quickly to an invitation to become involved in Scotland’s then fledgling arts and health network, which with a lot of hard work on the part of colleagues like Robbie McGhee (speaking later) we have helped grow to become Arts Culture Health and Wellbeing Scotland (ACHWS). This is now a registered charity in its own right, with seed-corn funding from the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland. I am currently the Secretary and Robbie is the Chair. For the first time, Scotland now has an active, national network providing information and support for anyone working across arts and culture, health, and wellbeing in Scotland. The network is open for anyone to join, including artists, organisations, healthcare providers and researchers, and I encourage you to look at its website and social media and indeed to join it!

The VHS network, as well as the ACHWS network, takes a strong interest in SP. VHS is currently involved in several significant pieces of work on this front. In Scotland as elsewhere in the UK there are very

many models of SP and link working, many of them led by community and voluntary organisations. In Scotland one aspect of SP is the national community link worker (CLW) programme, funded by the Scottish Government through the primary care budget allocation to health and social care partnerships.

Nearly 250 CLWs are embedded within GP practices, and in policy terms they are part of the government's strategy to tackle Scotland's deep-rooted health inequalities. The Scottish Government now plans to build on the success of the national programme, to ensure every GP practice in the country has access to a dedicated mental wellbeing link worker, creating a network of 1,000 additional dedicated staff who can help grow community mental health resilience and help direct SP.

This is the context in which VHS's direct involvement in SP is currently taking place. First, we are busy facilitating a series of conversations between Edinburgh's CLWs and the city's arts and culture practitioners and organisations. We have done this to support Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership's efforts to ensure that the SP offer through primary care is enriched by the inclusion of more arts and culture opportunities. The starting point has been to encourage stronger engagement and to bridge some gaps in understanding between practitioners, and so far all involved have been enthusiastic, with some early collaboration amongst practitioners now starting to take shape. Secondly, VHS has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to scope and test the establishment of a dedicated national network and community of practice for the CLWs.

CLWs in GP practices across Scotland are working to many different models of practice and they have said they lack the opportunity to come together as primary care practitioners, to learn from each other, share good practice and explore common challenges. Although there are several national SP networks around, these are not fulfilling the particular needs of Scotland's CLWs.

I am really hopeful that there will be opportunities in the future for this new network to promote and share arts related SP practice and learning. And I am hopeful that in time this will support greater understanding within primary care, about the meaning that the arts can bring to people's lives, and the potential for the arts to contribute even more to support people's recovery, self-management, and overall mental and physical wellbeing. Thank you for listening. I hope this has given you a small insight into the topic as viewed through a Scottish lens and that you will check out both VHS and ACHWS for yourselves.

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