

All in it together



For the last year, ACOSVO, Children in Scotland and Voluntary Health Scotland have been working together as part of an Equal Partners programme. Here, they share with us the progress and future plans

As third sector intermediary bodies covering the areas of leadership, children and health, we have considerable experience in common, but much to learn from our different approaches, skilled teams and organisational vision.

Our partnership began with two initial pieces of collaborative work. The first was an event, 'Equal Partners: Leading for children and young people's health and wellbeing,' which aimed to connect leaders across the third and public sectors, facilitating dialogue and building mutual understanding with the aim of improving leadership for transformational change. The second was a piece of research on partnership working Cross Sector Partnerships from a Leadership Perspective.

The outcome of our collaboration was an agreement to try and "walk the talk", considering how we can bring added value to the work we all do as member

organisations in the third sector, but working closely with the public sector; with the support of the Scottish Government.

Challenges and opportunities

We found a huge amount of value in collaboration – learning from each other as leaders and as a peer support group, bringing our teams together to share learning and exploring how we can widen out our audiences and our areas of interest.

We now have a much better understanding of each other's organisations, of what we are trying to achieve, the policy context and environments we work in and our leadership styles. So far the only place we started to come unstuck was where our collective Gathering stand should be sited. Because we had been working together and had built relationships, we turned what could have been a contentious discussion into a compromise that we could all agree on – and hopefully will stand us in good stead if more gritty challenges come our way.

Putting it into practice

A common strand across our collective organisations is a commitment to tackling inequalities and transforming

public services through an assets-based approach working across the third and public sector. Working collaboratively, we have identified and are delivering a programme of work which we believe informs and supports this commitment.

In January, we hosted a roundtable on the theme of 'progressive universalism' led by Jim McCormick of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who outlined the scale of the challenge and how a progressive approach to universal services could help tackle some of the deepest inequalities within our society, alongside the public sector reform agenda. He then posed the challenge for the leaders around the table about what action we can take to make the changes necessary to improve outcomes for all citizens. The focus was on the small changes that we can all make, as well as how we can influence the large-scale change required to really make a difference.

Building on this at the Third Sector Gathering, we hosted a (physically and mentally) active session introducing the Optimists' Network. The session demonstrated the positive outcomes that can happen when you create a space for civil servants, public sector and third sector partners to work together on an equal footing to tackle real assets-based challenges that face Scotland today.

At the recent Summit, we gathered together leaders from across third and public sectors to hear from those who are putting an assets-based approach into action to deliver real change, and then focused on active leadership challenges around how we are taking forward this agenda within our own organisations. Once again, we were able to realise the human assets within the room by facilitating new networks and potential collaborations, with a strong focus on action. Our future activity includes bringing together our three boards with members of the third sector unit at Scottish Government for a shared learning session. We also

believe in the importance of leadership at all levels within an organisation, and we will be bringing together our staff teams to share knowledge and experience. The teams are already identifying the themes that they would like to discuss with each other, and creating their own networks to improve their contributions to improving outcomes and supporting our members.

Once we have completed our planned activities, it's probably time for us to reflect on what we have learned through this process, both in terms of how we have worked together collaboratively as well as the outputs of the projects we have co-delivered.

We also need to consider how this work fits with the wider collaborative activities across public services such as the Scottish Leaders Forum, and Workforce Scotland.

Finally, we need to think about how we can best share the learning from our collective journey with others who may also be looking at working together more closely.

The Equal Partners Programme is a collaboration between the Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations (ACOSVO), Children in Scotland and Voluntary Health Scotland

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Join the Optimists Network on Linked In: www.linkedin.com/groups/Assets-Optimists-network-6941914/about

"We now have a better understanding of each other's organisations"

The Equal Partners Timeline

