



Medway Voluntary Action

Report on a survey to identify the impact of MVA on the Voluntary and Community Sector in Medway



MVA are an important asset to the area, every area should have an organisation dedicated to supporting the Voluntary Sector



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1. Background

As with the previous survey, this research was undertaken at a time of great upheaval for the not-for-profit sector in Medway which faces a perfect storm that threatens the existence of many organisations. Funding is harder to find with the loss of council grants, increased competition for funds from churches and schools and a commissioning processes that favours larger and commercial organisations. The living wage and auto-enrolment are increasing costs and there is increased demand as austerity continues to bite and changes to the benefit system and the reduction in frontline services impact on vulnerable families.

An ageing population and a significant rise in the number of people living with long-term conditions are placing additional pressure on health and social care resources. Continuing cuts impact on the ability of statutory services to meet demand and maintain quality. Charities play an important role in meeting these challenges by providing expert care, raising awareness, supporting vulnerable people and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing.

It is also a challenging time for MVA. We face increased demand from the sector as it seeks to address its challenges; sources of funding for infrastructure provision beyond statutory contracts are non-existent; statutory bodies are increasingly turning to infrastructure bodies to harness the assets of the sector to ease the crisis in health and social care - the sector is changing fast with organisations working at the margins of their missions, a rise in social enterprise and an increasing focus on community-led solutions.

The sector is diverse in structure, reach, services delivered and client groups served. It plays important roles in community cohesion, regeneration, combatting social isolation, returning to employment, mental health provision and obesity. It also cross-cuts issues, an organisation working with people who are substance dependent will be dealing with all the associated issues including homelessness, mental health, wellbeing and poverty.

Medway Voluntary Action (MVA) has undertaken this research to help inform understanding of its impact on the sustainability and development of the not-for-profit sector in Medway, what value the sector places on its services and what it can do to improve them.

2. Methodology

This is part of a two part survey with the other part investigating the state of not for profit sector in Medway. Visit our website or contact MVA for a copy of the state of the sector report.

In order to facilitate comparison, this survey used the same questions as the previous survey on MVA's impact in early 2016. (See Appendix A for a full copy of the survey questions).

An online questionnaire was distributed through the Mailchimp platform to 542 contacts drawn from:

- MVA's membership which comprises Voluntary & Community groups of all sizes and areas of interest, including social care, health, the arts, heritage and the environment
- People who have attended MVA events
- Key stakeholders who we have worked with (including Councillors and Council officers, local DWP contacts etc.)
- People who have attended training with NKTS (MVA's training arm)
- Subscribers to MVA's newsletter
- People who have had one-to-one support from MVA

Responses were incentivised with a prize draw and some telephone follow-up calls were made to encourage participation

95 responses were received, a 17.5% response rate.

This part of the survey asked respondents to:

- Identify which of MVA's services they had used
- Rate their interaction with each service on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being not very useful and 5 being extremely useful)
- Identify outcomes for their service users
- Identify the overall impact on their organisation
- Tell us what we could do to help their organisation be more sustainable

3. Limitations

Not-for-profit organisations can have a variety of people responding to surveys on their behalf. Respondents may not have access to detailed or highly accurate information relating to the management or governance of the organisation, and questions were devised to be accessible to people with a 'fair working knowledge' of the organisation, rather than an expert technical knowledge. For this reason most questions invite 'broad brush stroke' responses, asking respondents to place their group in a band or bracket, rather than give specific detail. It is therefore fair to say that while the survey was carried out with a methodological focus on organisational entities, the views given were fully those of individuals involved with them.

There is a need to be aware of issues around the localisation of services. Some service areas may have very limited local provision but good regional provision; some Kent-based organisations have users and volunteers in Medway and there are a number of national organisations working in Medway. It was decided that the criteria for inclusion was that the organisation delivers services in Medway.

This survey accepted that classifications of activities and client groups must be defined by the group rather than being imposed. In order to facilitate this, a number of questions included an open dialogue box.

4. Analysis

The report includes analysis of aggregated responses to the questions, but also includes analysis by interaction with MVA to identify the impact of different interactions on the sustainability of the recipient organisation, i.e. has that interaction made organisation stronger, better informed and more connected?

The first part of the survey asked respondents to identify which of MVA's services they had used and to rate their interaction with each area of MVA on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being not very useful and 5 being extremely useful.

4.1 Website

90.5% of respondents reported using the MVA website; they rated their experience as follows:

1. 0%
2. 4.7%
3. 29.1%
4. 48.8%
5. 17.4%

In the previous survey 88% rated their experience as very or extremely useful. The most recent survey indicates a small decline in satisfaction. This may in part be due to increasing shifts toward the use of social media and mobile platforms. This is reflected in MVAs increasing engagement through social media, (for example our Twitter following has grown by nearly 40% in the last year), one respondent commented on the website saying, *"Haven't had much time to look at it lately but glad it is there. I mostly use social media"*.

We are in the process of reviewing our website design and content to ensure it meets our audience needs and is easy to navigate to the content that they are looking for.

When responses were set against the overall impact of interactions with MVA on making the respondent's organisation stronger, better informed and/or more connected, responses from people who had visited the MVA website were as follows:

	Website	Overall
Stronger	15%	18%
Better informed	73%	75%
More connected	51%	48%

4.2 One to One Support

58.9% of respondents reported having a one-to-one support session; they rated their experience as follows:

1. 0%

2. 2.6%
3. 7.7%
4. 33.3%
5. 56.4%

In the previous survey 84% rated their experience as very or extremely useful. The level of satisfaction has increased and, based on respondents' comments, the service is clearly valued. However, this is a resource intensive form of support and as such, provision is limited.

MVA has developed activities designed to make direct support more widely available through events and seminars around specific subjects such as commissioning and social value, including seminars on trustee responsibilities, inviting specialists such as the Big and Heritage Lottery funds to run local surgeries, providing toolkits and templates online and signposting to specialist organisations for free consultations.

Set against the overall impact of interactions with MVA on making the respondent's organisation stronger, better informed and more connected, responses from people who had received one-to-one support were as follows:

	One to One	Overall
Stronger	24%	17%
Better informed	71%	75%
More connected	55%	48%

4.3 Newsletter

71% of respondents reported subscribing to the MVA newsletter; they rated their experience as follows:

1. 0%
2. 3%
3. 14.9%
4. 46.3%
5. 35.8%

In the previous survey 81% rated their experience as very or extremely useful. We have seen a slight increase in the level of satisfaction. Work is underway to broaden the content that is available in order to better connect Medway organisations with the national context, including disseminating learning and best practice from national organisations.

Set against the overall impact of interactions with MVA on making the respondent's organisation stronger, better informed and/or more connected, responses from newsletter subscribers were as follows:

	Newsletter	Overall
Stronger	11%	17%
Better informed	80%	75%
More connected	46%	48%

4.4 Events & Seminars

60% of respondents reported attending MVA events and seminars, they rated their experience as follows:

1. 0%
2. 1.8%
3. 19.6%
4. 44.6%
5. 33.9%

In the previous survey 87% rated their experience as very or extremely useful. The latest figures represent a slight decline. This may reflect the demise of our Community Engagement Network events and the shift to networking and collaboration through the Medway Leaders Network.

We thoroughly evaluate events and receive overwhelmingly positive responses; where there are concerns we make changes as appropriate as part of an ongoing process.

Set against the overall impact of interactions with MVA on making the respondent's organisation stronger, better informed and/or more connected, event attendees responded as follows:

	Events	Overall
Stronger	20%	17%
Better informed	57%	75%
More connected	73%	48%

4.5 Training

64.1% of respondents reported receiving training from NKTS, they rated their experience as follows:

1. 0%
2. 0%
3. 9.1%
4. 48.5%
5. 42.4%

In the previous survey 94% rated their experience as very or extremely useful NKTS has maintained a relatively consistent level of satisfaction while going through a period of change in approach and the curriculum offer.

We thoroughly evaluate our training offer and receive overwhelmingly positive responses; where there are concerns we make changes as appropriate as part of an ongoing process.

Set against the overall impact of interactions with MVA on making the respondent's organisation stronger, better informed and/or more connected, responses from people who had received training were as follows:

	Training	Overall
Stronger	10%	17%
Better informed	81%	75%
More connected	52%	48%

5. Impact of MVA Support

In each section respondents were asked to comment on the ratings they gave. These illustrate MVA's impact under the themes of stronger, better informed and more connected, as below. This is a selection, a full list of comments can be found in Appendix B.

5.1 Feeling stronger

- *"(We)have received funding directly because of the newsletter"*
- *"We feel confident that MVA is there to seek advice"*
- *"Excellent resource for small charities/organisations that may not have in house experts"*
- *"MVA has highlighted many areas for me to consider in developing my business. We have had great advice regarding our organisational structure and advice on key issues"*
- *"Better informed of types of support available to organisations in Medway"*
- *"Moral support from the MVA team"*
- *"MVA is currently giving my organisation the tools to develop into a more sustainable organisation"*
- *"(I) receive extremely useful advice for the development of my organisation"*
- *"I find the resources provided extremely helpful"*

5.2 Better informed

- *"We have a greater knowledge of funding streams available to us"*
- *"I was really impressed with the time and care given to providing useful information in helping me work toward registering as a charity and seeking funding"*
- *"We are kept up to date with quality training"*
- *"MVA are approachable and knowledgeable, they have a good grasp of the local system and associated issues"*
- *"Very good current information and news"*
- *"The whole team underwent Safeguarding training to bring us up to date with national guidelines"*
- *"I tend to get most information that I need from your newsletter"*
- *"Helpful, tailored advice on various issues"*
- *"Very up-to-date informative support"*

5.3 More connected

- *“(Events) are always polished and professionally run”*
- *“we can now signpost to the mental health peer support groups”*
- *“(as) a presenter and it was great to talk to (MVA) members and gain insight into the challenges they face”*
- *“MVA has kindly given us links with community agencies”*
- *“Always willing to help, and signpost to relevant organisations”*
- *“Connections made”*
- *“(Events) always useful (to) network with stakeholders”*
- *“Being part of the VCS network is invaluable”*
- *“We built working partnerships”*
- *“The organisation is also useful for connecting our group to other groups in the areas. As a result we have increased the number of partners that we now have”*
- *“Has helped networking with other organisations”*
- *“MVA has a strong local network and provides opportunities for local organisations to meet up”*
- *“We are developing relationships with MVA members which will be mutually beneficial”*
- *“Good to be part of a wider collaborative network”*
- *“Assisted us to reach out to the community and make beneficial links”*

6. Outcomes

6.1 Service user outcomes

Respondents were asked to outline outcomes for their service users as a result of support from MVA. Responses included: (full list available in Appendix C):

- *“We have found funding to apply for, which has kept the project going”*
- *“Better opportunities and funding for programmes supporting users”*
- *“One volunteer achieved the L3 award in training”*
- *“Information available to individuals for obtaining services and transport”*
- *“Increased skills through training, voluntary placement for former service user”*
- *“Our relationship with MVA helps to ensure we are well connected with local VCS organisations and ensures we can signpost customers to suitable support”*
- *“Signposting and support for customers through networking”*
- *“We have better partnerships to help refer our service users to other forms of support available”*
- *“We have had visits from local colleges, support from scouts, links with parent forum”*
- *“We have improved our safeguarding significantly and benefited from being able to organise services for the local community”*
- *“People we have worked with have subsequently received support re funding and business advice from MVA”*

- *“Better knowledge of local voluntary organisations' development and good networking opportunities, both of which mean we're better able to serve our local community”*
- *“Free printmaking courses provided following grant applied for after reading MVA newsletter”*
- *“Policies informed by MVA advice have helped us to provide a more professional service”*

6.2 Organisation outcomes

Respondents were asked to identify whether support from MVA had made their organisation feel stronger, better informed and/or more connected with the option of ticking as many as they felt applied to their organisation.

Responses to this question were as follows:

	Previous survey	Current survey
Stronger	15%	17%
Better informed	71.3%	75%
More connected	47.5%	48%

Only 48% of the respondents ticked more than one box so it is likely that the question wasn't clearly understood as intended. This is illustrated by the high level of respondents that reported feeling better informed which, by definition, must mean that they feel stronger. There is a need to revisit the survey design for next year and to clarify this question.

Respondents were asked, “What could MVA do to help your organisation to be more sustainable, better informed and/or more engaged?” 52 responses were made.

38% of respondents indicated that they were happy with the service, responses included:

- *“By continuing to provide help and support to the voluntary sector, acting as a focal point highlighting opportunities for the voluntary sector”*
- *“Not sure as I'm satisfied with the level of support we currently receive”*
- *“Offering the 1:1 service as a follow up is great”*

15% requested more support with funding, responses included:

- *“Continue to inform us about opportunities to be part of consortia, give opportunities to smaller charities to be part of bigger bids”*
- *“Direct help with sourcing funding on a regular basis”*
- *“Brokering grant applications”*
- *“Assist with small project grants”*
- *“Given up on applying for grants because they take too much time and effort for no result because we do not fit criteria, I want simple contacts with organisations who value basic community work”*
- *“Look at sustainable funding strategies for social enterprises”*

15% requested more networking opportunities, responses included:

- *“It would be great if services were encouraged to share information to their service users so that organisations are not doubling up on what they offer when funding could be shared”*
- *“More networking/events”*
- *“More regular ‘social’ events”*

12% requested support with volunteering, both identifying them and promoting their availability, responses included:

- *“Connect us with volunteers with specific skills”*
- *“Promote us for volunteers”*
- *“Promote (my organisation) as a source of volunteers”*
- *“More access to volunteers”*

8% wanted support raising the profile of their organisations and the sector generally, responses included:

- *“Reaching service users is really hard”*
- *“Spread the work locally about what we do”*
- *“Publicise the good work done by some of the local charities”*

Other responses included:

- *“Some specific networking/advice/training for CiCs”*
- *“Provide legal & contract advice”*
- *“Find me more time”*
- *“One to one session to advise on our next steps as an organisation. Up to me to make that call though - I know you're there!”*
- *“Heighten their profile so that more organisations are aware of their existence and the services/support on offer”*
- *“Clearer signposting on the website suitable for charities or voluntary organisations and information about what MVA do”*

7. Conclusion

The survey identified that respondents value the services they receive and consider them to be of high quality. The responses also demonstrate the importance of infrastructure support in changing, uncertain times.

All elements of the current MVA offer make a contribution to our strategic goals of empowering and providing resources to enable the sector to be sustainable and have a voice, to impact on statutory sector strategy going forward and to provide opportunities for engagement between organisations and sectors.

The survey identified that resource intensive interactions, such as training, one-to-one support and events achieve strong outcomes, however our resources to provide this level of engagement are limited by the level of funding we receive.

We underwrite our training provision by charging the lowest fee possible, however this still limits access for some organisations, with one respondent asking for

“realistically priced training courses”. It also, by definition, limits the range of training we are able to offer.

We are able to minimise the cost of events by using our networks to identify donated venues, expert speakers who are willing to provide their time on a voluntary basis and by timing events to avoid providing catering beyond tea and biscuits; other catering is often donated by the host organisation

Our communications provision underpins our work and outcomes for the website and the newsletter mirror the overall outcomes. However, this provision is human and financially resource intensive and is underpinned by the hard work of our volunteers, Angela and Fouad. Our increasing reach on social media allows us to increase our return from our investment in communications at very little cost or impact on resources and we are investigating ways that we might harness this.

We have learnt that MVA is very good at providing support appropriate to respondents’ needs. However, making the sector feel stronger is difficult in a ‘perfect storm’ of declining income, increasing costs and increasing demand for services. MVA is already seeking to address this by taking the lead on a range of new initiatives that will benefit the VCS and will deliver new opportunities for peer support and collaboration such as the Medway Voluntary Sector Leaders Network.

We are also seeking to enhance networking and engagement through the development of a searchable online directory of organisations delivering services in Medway (again, thanks to our volunteers Samuel and John.) This should stand alone and is a vehicle to support Medway organisations to jointly bid for funds and deliver services in partnership.

While respondents were overwhelmingly positive, MVA will follow up low rankings and comments to gain further insight into how we can improve our services.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the individuals who participated in our survey.

Appendix A -Survey questions

Support from Medway Voluntary Action

Have you visited the MVA website?

Yes

No

How useful did you find the MVA website?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not very useful	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely useful				

Any additional comments regarding the rating that you have provided?

Your answer

Have you received any one to one support from MVA?

Yes

No

How useful did you find the support?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not very useful	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely useful				

Any additional comments regarding the rating that you have provided?

Your answer

Do you subscribe to the MVA newsletter?

- Yes
- No

How useful do you find the MVA newsletter?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not very useful	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely useful				

Any additional comments regarding the rating that you have provided?

Your answer

Have you attended any MVA networking events or seminars?

- Yes
- No

How useful did you find the MVA events?

	1	2	3	4	5	
	<input type="radio"/>					

Any additional comments regarding the rating that you have provided?

Your answer

Have you attended training with MVA's training arm, North Kent Training service?

- Yes
- No

How useful did you find the training from North Kent Training service?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not very useful	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely useful				

Any additional comments regarding the rating that you have provided?

Your answer

Impact

Please tell us about any outcomes for your service users as a result of support from Medway Voluntary Action.

Your answer

Has support from Medway Voluntary Action made your organisation:

- Stronger
- Better informed
- More connected
- Other: _____

Please explain your answer

Your answer

What could MVA do to help your organisation to be more sustainable, better informed and/or more engaged?

Your answer

Appendix B - Comments on impact of MVA support

Met other local people with common concerns, understand how to approach funding applications / policy making better, feels good to know there is support there if we need it.

I find it helpful to understand what organisations are doing local to me and to see examples of good work.

MVA is currently giving my organisation the tools to develop into a more sustainable organisation.

I appreciate the newsletters and the networking as they help keep me in touch.

Helped to increase awareness of Headway.

Keeping abreast of what is happening with regard to the charitable sector in Medway.

PUK in Medway is now collaborating with other neurological charities thanks to MVA.

Has helped networking with other organisations.

MVA has excellent networks in Medway and is a reliable source of local contacts and intelligence.

Members phone MVA and information is passed on.

Good to be part of a wider collaborative network.

We have had great advice regarding our organisational structure and advice on key issues.

Be able to reach other groups of support networks.

Good source of local information and networks.

Good source of information.

The newsletter is excellent for information; the organisation is also useful for connecting our group to other groups in the areas. As a result we have increased the number of partners that we now have.

It has helped connect us with the wider community.

By providing opportunities to meet with other local voluntary and statutory service providers and by providing information on funding opportunities.

We are developing relationships with MVA members which will be mutually beneficial.

Assisted us to reach out to the community and make beneficial links.

Our group relies on speakers who will not charge and will come out in the evening. They must also relate to parents who are very stressed and feel abandoned. The whole idea is to develop the self-esteem that encourages parents to take responsibility. So the more links I can make the better.

Opportunity to meet with organisations that can support our customers.

You get swamped with info. The newsletter info is well presented and clear.

Increased access to more peers.

Information available to individuals for obtaining services and transport.

Information relevant to the sector.

Knowing what funding is available in the area.

Working with volunteers - very interesting.

MVA has highlighted many areas for me to consider in developing my business.

The whole team underwent Safeguarding training to bring us up to date with national guidelines.

Promotion of the activities of my organisation may have helped in reaching more people.

MVA are an important asset to the area, every area should have an organisation dedicated to supporting the voluntary sector. It is important to have an organisation that can be contacted for support in subjects such as safeguarding.

We feel confident that MVA is there to seek advice.

We are kept up to date with quality training and our staff and developed.

Better informed regarding funding and training opportunities in particular.

Progression routes for learners either way on to training opportunities.

We have a greater knowledge of funding streams available to us etc.

More aware of opportunities.

MVA has a strong local network and provides opportunities for local organisations to meet up.

Updates on funding and other opportunities.

Good networking opportunities and a chance to be updated on services available in Medway.

I haven't used MVA properly.

Courses attended have proved to be very informative.

Neville Dack has looked into ways to help us.

Through various training.

Appendix C - Comments on service user outcomes

Better knowledge of local voluntary organisations' development and good networking opportunities, both of which mean we're better able to serve our local community.

Free printmaking courses provided following grant applied for after reading MVA newsletter. Policies informed by MVA advice have helped us to provide a more professional service.

Better opportunities and funding for programmes supporting users.

We can now signpost to the mental health peer support groups.

We have found funding to apply for, which has kept the project going.

Better informed of types of support available to organisations in Medway.

Better health, self-care empowerment.

We have better partnerships to help refer our service users to other forms of support available.

Working with MVA will be helping the local community and parents, having a better liaison with schools.

One volunteer achieved the L3 Award in Training & a new teacher was recruited from the course too.

*We have had visits from local colleges, support from scouts, links with parent forum
Increased skills through training, voluntary placement for former SU.*

We have improved our safeguarding significantly and benefited from being able to organise services for the local community, thanks to funding organised or promoted via the MVA website.

Information sharing, training opportunities.

MVA help signpost funding opportunities locally.

Better connected.

Links with local support.

Our relationship with MVA helps to ensure we are well connected with local VCS organisations and ensures we can signpost customers to suitable support.

Signposting and support for customers through networking.

Become aware of other organisations work and trends in funding.

Improved networks.

Some staff have become paid workers.

Personal development through NKTS.

Some inspiration through networking.

Information.

Promotion of the activities of my organisation may have helped in reaching more people.

Greater confidence, and improved skills level.

Assurance.

High quality support.

We have been able to keep up to date with latest training and up to date on polies and procedures.

I know people we have worked with have subsequently received support re: funding and business advice from MVA.

Knowing where to look for funding opportunities.