



Supporting the voluntary sector
working in the criminal justice system

Member advisory forum meeting notes

Tuesday 16 April 2024, 13:00-15:00 via video call

Attendees

Emma Kidger	Clinks (chair)
Riana Taylor	Circles UK
Matina Marougka	Together for Mental Wellbeing
Christopher Leslie	Inside Out Support Wales
John Speyer	Hear Me Out
Bex Roberts	Junction 42
Laura Munt	Depaul UK
Paul Wiltshire	Clinks
Abi Lunn	Clinks
Courtney Newson	Clinks

Apologies

Maisie Hulbert	Clinks Trustee
Lynn Kelly	POPS
Dawn Harrison	Changing Lives
Josh Stunell	bthechange CIC
Lucy Ball	New Bridge Foundation

1. Welcome and introductions

EK welcomed everyone to the meeting, apologies noted.

2. State of the Sector research

Abi, Senior Policy and Communications Officer at Clinks, shared insights from the latest [State of the Sector](#) research, conducted in collaboration with NCVO. The research encompassed a quantitative survey with 151 responses, representing a notable 51% increase from 2022 and a return to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, it involved two focus groups with voluntary organisations, three interviews with charitable trusts and foundations, and analysis of Charity Commission data.

Key findings revealed that the criminal justice voluntary sector predominantly comprises small organisations providing a diverse range of services to a variety of people, both within prisons and in the community. Most organisations reported an increase in the number of new service users and a rise in the level, complexity, and urgency of service user needs. To adapt, organisations are adopting more flexible approaches and increasing partnership working, albeit with staff facing larger caseloads.

Government/statutory contracts and grants from trusts and foundations emerged as the primary sources of funding for organisations, with the majority delivering services under contract or sub-contract. While respondents generally had positive experiences with grant funding, they expressed dissatisfaction with contract funding. Despite stable or increasing income from grants and contracts, almost four-in-five organisations reported rising running costs, leading to uncertainties about future financial sustainability.

Looking ahead, organisations emphasised the importance of investing in intervention and prevention services, leveraging the expertise of voluntary sector organisations, and empowering local partnership approaches.

One of the ideas presented for the State of the Sector research next year involves a roadshow approach consisting of focus groups, potentially organised regionally or thematically, to expand the reach and capture more interest from the sector. This would include those working in prevention/diversion and organisations working with children and young people, an area underrepresented in the most recent survey. Interviews would still be conducted, and input on methodology is welcomed, particularly regarding the best approach to engage people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, both as service providers and recipients. The roadshow approach aims to alleviate the burden on individuals within organisations by opening up participation to those who can speak more directly to the questions being asked.

- There was consensus on the value of thematic focus groups to capture diverse perspectives, with suggestions to target invites to increase uptake. Maintaining a balance between smaller and larger organisations and retaining the survey component for its comprehensive data collection were highlighted as crucial.
- The facilitation of focus groups was deemed important to ensure productive discussions – ensuring the facilitator/s were skilled in encouraging people to contribute appropriately.
- Forum members advocated for a two-pronged approach combining both the usual survey and focus groups, emphasising the complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative data.
- Concerns were raised about potentially losing rich comparative data if moving entirely to a roadshow-style approach, emphasising the importance of continuity and ability to directly compare with historical data.

These insights will inform future iterations of the State of the Sector research, with consideration given to enhancing methodology and ensuring inclusivity of diverse perspectives.

3. Clinks job board

Clinks is exploring ways to enhance the functionality of the job board and considering strategies to both improve user experience and generate additional income. One consideration that was discussed was whether the job board is best placed to advertise job vacancies from HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Currently, the job board on our website allows members to post vacancies for free, while non-members are charged a fee for job posts, extending the service to the wider voluntary sector operating in criminal justice.

- Discussion highlighted potential challenges that would need to be considered if Clinks were to advertise HMPPS vacancies on the jobs board, such as the impact on voluntary sector

workforce retention and recruitment, the volume of HMPPS vacancies and the vetting requirements associated with HMPPS roles.

- Forum members highlighted the need for improved functionality on the job board, including better filtering and search options. There's also a suggestion to introduce a paid structure for job posts, particularly from larger organisations, to manage the influx of vacancies and generate additional income.
- Another suggestion was to spotlight certain job vacancies directly on the job board, rather than separately in newsletters or publications like Light Lunch, as a means to increase visibility and potential income.
- Forum members proposed creating a section on the job board specifically highlighting organisations actively seeking individuals with lived experience, promoting inclusivity and diversity within the sector.
- Exploring partnerships with larger job boards, such as Charity Jobs, was suggested as a way to expand exposure for vacancies posted on our job board, potentially increasing traffic and engagement.

These considerations will inform decisions regarding the future direction of the job board, balancing income generation with the original purpose of supporting the voluntary sector within criminal justice.

4. Clinks and HMPPS/MoJ quarterly commissioning forum

At Clinks' latest quarterly meeting with the central commissioning team for HMPPS/MoJ in March, we discussed resetting the strategic focus for our forum. It was agreed that monthly catch ups between Clinks and the central commissioning teams would focus on operational issues and opportunities for the voluntary sector, allowing for the quarterly forums to have a more strategic focus on understanding the voluntary sector landscape.

HMPPS/MoJ expressed interest in gaining a more strategic understanding of the sector and the need for Clinks' assistance in better understanding the sector's composition and its engagement capabilities with various opportunities.

Forum members suggested the following to be priority areas for Clinks to aim to influence MoJ/HMPPS about in future commissioning:

- **Grant Funding vs. Contracting:** The need to move away from contracting to be the standard approach, particularly for smaller value competitions, and consider the feasibility of grant funding. Small and specialist organisations particularly struggle with the administrative burden of contracting, and grant funding can offer a more flexible alternative conducive to innovative service delivery.
- **Regional Commission Model:** Concerns were raised about the regional commission model, which tends to exclude smaller organisations unless they engage through subcontracting.
- **Multi-Year Funding:** There was a consensus on the necessity of multi-year funding arrangements to provide stability for organisations. The challenges associated with the length of time mobilisation and exit planning processes take for short-term funding are well known across the sector, and this has a negative impact on the quality-of-service provision overall.
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These responses reflect the perspectives shared during the meeting and highlight areas where Clinks can potentially influence central commissioning practices to better support the voluntary sector within criminal justice.

5. What issues / opportunities are we seeing facing the sector at the moment?

- **Early Release and Resettlement:** The implementation of early release measures through the End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) has raised concerns about its impact on successful resettlement. With an already strained housing situation, early release exacerbates challenges in finding suitable accommodation for individuals leaving the criminal justice system, amongst many other challenges that must be considered when release dates are changed, particularly at short notice.
- **Asylum System and Accommodation:** Individuals granted asylum often face significant challenges, including a short timeframe to exit their accommodation once they receive their settled status. This time constraint can lead to stress and difficulties, especially considering many have been unable to work while awaiting a decision, increasing the risk of homelessness and further marginalisation due to the costs associated with sustaining stable accommodation.
- **Collaborative Campaigning and Advocacy:** With a potential general election on the horizon, there is heightened collaborative campaigning across the sector to amplify agendas and ensure voices are heard. Clinks has an opportunity to engage with and promote this work, advocating for the interests and needs of the sector to policymakers and the public.

6. Advisory forum sub-groups

- In February, Clinks Member Advisory Forum organised an event titled 'Building a resilient workforce – lessons learnt,' featuring speakers John, Matina, Dawn, and Lucy.
- The event received excellent feedback from attendees, who valued the insights shared. Clinks expresses gratitude for the support from sub-groups in organising the event.
- A recording of the event can be accessed here: [Building a resilient workforce - lessons learnt \(youtube.com\)](#)
- Moving forward, the forum will explore another area of focus this year, shifting attention to 'capacity building for small and specialist organisations.' This was the second sub-group that was created last February, however due to capacity there was not as much progress in 2023-24 as we had hoped. Other topics that were raised within the 'voluntary sector workforce sub-group alongside staff retention and wellbeing will remain areas of focus for the Clinks team.

7. AOB

- Matina, Lynn, and Riana have extended their term for a further two years, continuing their valuable contributions to the forum.
- Khatuna, Peter, and Janine have concluded their terms as members of the forum. We appreciate their dedication and input during their tenure.
- Dawn has stepped down from the forum. We thank her for her contributions and know that she will continue to work closely with the Clinks team .
- As per our [Terms of Reference](#), the forum aims to comprise a group of 10-15 representatives from the voluntary sector working in the criminal justice system. In May - June, we will initiate the recruitment process to ensure a diverse and representative membership moving forward.

8. Meeting admin

Next meeting: Tuesday 16 July 2024, 1-3pm