**Organisations’ Invitation to Participate**

**Supporting** **the VSCE paid workforce: An Action Research Study**

**A collaboration between researchers at the University of Sheffield and Leeds Beckett University**

**We invite your organisation to participate** in a research project about improving professional and wellbeing support for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) employees whose role involves delivering health and wellbeing-related support to service users. By health and wellbeing support roles, we mean roles such as Social Prescribing Link Workers, Health and Wellbeing Coaches, Care coordinators, and other personalised care roles, as well as Community Development Workers and Youth Workers.

**About the study**

The project focuses on understanding how we can better support employees working for VCSEs to improve their wellbeing and stay in their roles. We will do this by working with six VCSE organisations (three in West Yorkshire and three in South Yorkshire) and co-designing professional and wellbeing support (such as training, peer networks or accreditation) with each VCSE organisation over 21 months. Organisations will pilot the professional or wellbeing support over a fixed period. The study team will evaluate the design, delivery process, and outcomes for staff.

The study will be about gaining in-depth learning across six organisations. Therefore, we can provide feedback on what we’ve learnt about your organisation throughout the research project.

**The research will be implemented in three phases:**

**Phase 1:** We will explore staff experiences at your organisation, e.g., what professional and wellbeing support has been tried previously, examples of good practice, what type of support they would like to be in place and the current barriers and facilitators to implementing new support measures for staff.

**Phase 2:** We will co-design professional or wellbeing support with your organisation and work with you whilst you implement the new support.

**Phase 3:** We will explore the implementation process and your organisation's experiences around implementing new professional or wellbeing support. We want to learn about the positive impact of and the potential challenges to implementation to inform improving workforce support for VCSE organisations.

The research is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research.

Further information about the study is available at: [**https://fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk/award/NIHR159286**](https://fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk/award/NIHR159286)

**Benefits for your organisation from participating in the project**

* It is an opportunity to learn more about how your organisation supports staff and try new ways of providing support.
* Organisations like yours are committed to working with communities, and employees are your most important asset. Engagement in the project could assist your organisation with recruitment and retention by strengthening support for paid staff.
* Engagement in a prestigious NIHR-funded project will enhance the profile of your organisation, which in turn could influence decision-makers and funders.
* We have strong connections with national and regional policy organisations, and as this is an under-researched area, this work will be important in building evidence-based, effective professional and wellbeing support strategies.
* As six organisations will be involved in this project, there will be an opportunity to share learning.
* Alongside the report for the overall research, we will provide you with an update on the findings from your specific organisation, which you may find helpful to evidence your impact and develop your work.

**What resources will be in place to support your organisation during the project?**

We understand that many community-led organisations are operating to full capacity and would find it challenging to take on any additional activity. To help ensure that any additional work for community-led organisation staff is minimised, project activities will be managed by researchers from the collaborating universities. An honorarium of **£1,000** will also be provided to compensate for time spent by your organisation on the project. This will be paid in two instalments during the project. We have budgeted for training, travel and other costs to ensure that the professional and wellbeing support can be fully co-designed.

**What would we be asking your organisation to do or provide?**

* Be willing to try to implement professional or wellbeing support and share learning on the experience.
* Work with us for the duration of the research programme (until April 2027) and provide a main liaison for your organisation.
* The main contact will join our area-based action group. This will meet up to 8 times over 21 months, approximately every 6 months (with three meetings over 4 months in spring 2026 to design professional or wellbeing support strategies)
* Allow 4-6 staff members (at service delivery and management levels) to be interviewed by our researchers to understand their views on supporting staff. We will interview these staff twice, once before and then again after the professional or wellbeing support strategy has been implemented, to evaluate its impact. These interviews will take up to an hour and can be conducted in person, on the phone or online.
* Circulate recruitment materials for staff, inviting them to participate in interviews and other study activities.
* Circulate an online survey to staff.
* Attend two stakeholder events during the study to share learning between organisations.
* Allow the researcher to spend time in your organisation, for example, attending team meetings and observing training sessions.
* Allow access to your current professional and wellbeing support materials, e.g. supervision policy. This part of the research will be discussed further to examine what is feasible in your specific organisation, given GDPR and ethical guidelines.

**What does an organisation need to do to become part of the project?**

Firstly, complete the Expression of Interest form below. We will then contact you to discuss what the study will involve in greater detail.

If you have any questions before expressing an interest, please get in touch with Sophia Arthurs-Hartnett, Research Associate, vcseworkforcestudy@sheffield.ac.uk

**Expression of Interest Form**

Please complete and return this form to record your expression of interest in participating in the VCSE Paid Workforce Research Study

Organisation:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Contact e-mail:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate by ticking the boxes below whether your organisation meets one or more of the following criteria (Please tick all that apply):

[ ]  Works with and/or has a staff group from minoritised communities.

[ ]  Is based in an area of socio-economic deprivation.

[ ]  Has recruited front-line workers from service users and/or volunteers.

[ ]  Is linked to a regional/national charity.

[ ]  Is a smaller organisation with 5-15 staff members.

[ ]  Is a larger VCSE with 20 or more staff.

[ ]  Is based in a rural area.

*Form continued on next page.*

Please provide a brief description (Up to approx.. 200 words) of the work and purpose of the organisation:

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Our organisation wishes to express interest in participating in the study, and I look forward to hearing more about the project.

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Role\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please return the Expression of Interest form to vcseworkforcestudy@sheffield.ac.uk

Alternatively, if you do not feel able to be a partner for our project but wish to be kept up to date with our research, please email us at vcseworkforcestudy@sheffield.ac.uk. We will only contact you about the research study and will not share your information outside of the study.

***Thank you for your interest in the project.***