

VASLan advocacy campaign

Engagement review

We want to hear your organisation's story!

Are you a staff member or volunteer with a third sector organisation that operates in South Lanarkshire? Then we want to hear from you!

We are putting together an Impact Report, pulling together both stories and data to show to external stakeholders the difference that third sector organisations in South Lanarkshire are making, and why we (the third sector) need their support.

We need your submissions by **Thursday 29th February** and all will be collated and form a key part of our campaign for real change!

Click the link below to complete the form:

[VASLan Impact Report Submission Form](#)

Introduction

Following a period of engagement we've pulled together a summary of our findings, drawing out a series of key themes.

We engaged with over 100 different types of organisations, learning that South Lanarkshire's third sector is incredibly diverse in the type of charities, community groups and social enterprises and their geographical spread.

What we did:

- Conducted a survey with 92 survey responses from people working for charities, community groups and social enterprises in South Lanarkshire
- Four in-person engagement sessions.
- Seven 1-2-1s with senior staff at various VASLan-supported organisations.

A range of themes

From our research, we have drawn out some key themes which we hope will help shape our upcoming co-production sessions. Further on in the document we've mapped out which we believe are the priorities to the campaign's development.

'The third sector in South Lanarkshire is essential'

We got a clear sense of how essential a service many of these groups are providing to their communities and to South Lanarkshire.

Many feel that they are holding up the public sector as it sags under the weight of cuts to funding and resources.

The word ‘essential’ was one of the most common words used in our survey question: “*Share up to eight individual words to describe the work of all charities, community groups and social enterprises across South Lanarkshire.*”



Smarter funding required

A number of people suggested that it is not so much about the amount of money that is required to keep doors open, pay staff and put on services, but about how the funding is given and spent.

For example, one participant highlighted that grants given for three month projects are unhelpful because that does not give any flexibility based on factors outside the organisation's control.

Participants told us that there is an unrealistic expectation on charities and enterprises to determine outcomes and show expected results before being allocated funding, a near impossible task to accurately measure.

Better visibility and co-production with public sector

In one of the 1-2-1s we conducted, a participant mentioned that they have a great relationship with the public sector. They explained that many of their board and senior team sit on panels and advise on better co-production between them and the NHS. In turn this is helpful, but it's based on years of building up trust and showing what an essential service they provide.

By contrast, we have heard from participants that they sometimes feel like they are telling the council, NHS and other public service providers that they are here to help them but if only they could understand each other better.

It got us thinking that maybe there's something there in how the third sector advocates for itself to this particular (big) audience.

We don't think it's necessarily a lack of respect either, because some organisations said others (i.e. NHS) had referred them on (informally). Without funding or structure, capacity becomes a big issue.

There's a *systemic* issue here, but also one of *culture*. Communication generally is an issue, too.

Volunteers matter

A third of all survey respondents identified themselves as a volunteer. Many of the organisations we spoke to talked about how important volunteers are to their organisation.

This raises some interesting questions. Volunteering is good, but are organisations across South Lanarkshire having to rely upon them to fill gaps. And if so, what do we need to think about?

Partners in the private sector

A few participants in the sessions mentioned that they have benefitted from close relationships with private sector companies, in terms of funding but also in terms of voluntary service time given by companies.

As public sector services and funding is squeezed, maybe looking to the private sector to support the third sector as part of some kind of government initiative could be worth thinking about.

We also thought that this voluntary service idea could be something we explore with high schools as well? A way to show young people the value of helping their community. Local schools partner with local charities and social enterprises.

Remember rural

One thing that came out of the survey was the vast spread of organisations across the local authority. South Lanarkshire is a large area geographically and there is a concentration of charities and social enterprises in the more populous, urban areas in the north of the region.

We spoke to the development worker from a rural social enterprise who talked about the different challenges faced in areas with less people.

While this organisation had no problem getting money through wind farm grants for community projects, they struggled to be seen among other third sector organisations in the council area. They felt this also implanted their ability to get people to volunteer as they are drawing from a much smaller pool than a more urban charity or social enterprise.

Need to get the attention of politicians/decision makers

In the third sector, it's hard to get the recognition and attention they deserve. We heard from many passionate participants who wanted action at a political level.

A particular 1-2-1 session highlighted this in great detail:

"We need to make the political figures think hard about the problems facing the third sector."

"We need to engage all political parties and figures, not just those in position now."

"Politicians talk about local communities but are so removed from them, while the third sector is much closer to these communities - they're in them."

"We need to present a positive campaign that demonstrates the positive impact of the third sector in South Lanarkshire, but it needs to be more than that - an advocacy campaign that shows how drastic the situation is in this sector - people's lives are being affected!"

This isn't new information, because it's what has driven this commissioning of this campaign. However, we need to convert this into "so what" through co-production.

Summary

Following this engagement phase we have summarised what we believe are the key themes follows:

What we know	Many organisations in South Lanarkshire deliver high-quality services that are impactful - and measurable		
Key themes	South Lanarkshire organisations deliver life-essential services	Funding issues are big - but go beyond cash	There is a culture / comms challenge with public sector
What next?	Quantify this through the development of our self-reporting Impact Report	Consider a very clearly defined ask around funding that goes beyond "give us more"	Explore how we build a campaign that engages with key public bodies - talking their language

The issue of **private partnership** is valid but could undermine some elements of the campaign, whilst we think that the **rural point** is important, it's for us to remember that in the way we tell stories and shape the campaign. With regards to **volunteers**, we need to explore this further; we think a distinct part of the survey might help us understand better.

Next steps

We are in the process of creating a self-reporting Impact Report, put together by charities, social enterprises and community-interest groups, to capture stories and data from around the third sector in South Lanarkshire. We would love to hear your contributions, so if you have time, please complete the [submission form linked here](#).

Appendix I

“What do you need for your organisations?”





