

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector

Content (this will provide hyperlinks to the different sections)

- Summary guide
- The role of the VCFS in family hubs
- The importance of the VCFS in family hubs delivery
- Involving the VCFS in family hub development
- Supporting integration of the VCFS into family hubs

Summary guide

This module supports those developing family hubs to integrate them with the voluntary, community and faith sector. The voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) is diverse and includes different types of organisations. Including:

- **Charities** make up the largest segment of the voluntary sector, and often provide social, support and care services.
- **Community groups** provide a public or local community benefit, such as organising social events for seniors or planning community projects.
- **Social co-operatives (co-ops)** are owned and controlled by their individual members to serve a collective purpose.
- **Community interest companies (CICs)** are limited companies set up to achieve social objectives and benefit a particular community rather than private shareholders.
- **Credit unions** are financial institutions owned and controlled by their members.
- **Foundations** provide grants to charitable or philanthropic projects.
- **Culture and recreation groups** like youth, arts and sport groups, are not-for-profit organisations typically run by volunteers.
- **Parent teacher associations (PTAs)** are volunteer organisations that aim to enrich schools for children.
- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** focus on large-scale issues such as social care, environmental advocacy or human rights work. They can operate locally or globally.

The role of the VCFS in family hubs

The VCFS is essential to run an effective and sustainable family hub. These organisations understand their communities best and should be considered at all stages of family hubs planning, delivery and evaluation. VCFS organisations can be commissioned to deliver the Family Hubs programme in partnership with local authorities.

The VCFS can:

- be commissioned by local authorities and public health to deliver family hub services such as peer support

- chair strategic partnership boards alongside local authorities
- undertake participation and co-production work with children, young people and families
- complete short-term consultancy work to improve service delivery
- support children and young people who may struggle to access local authority services.

Relationships between the VCFS and local authorities should be reciprocal and acknowledge power imbalances. Many VCFS organisations work with minoritised groups and communities where local authorities hold more power, and recognising this will help build productive partnerships between organisations.

The Early Help System

The [Early Help System](#) is described by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and Department for Education as:

A network of services, processes and interactions that aim to help children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity. Improving this system requires clarity of what success looks like, shared across a range of partners, and informed by the voices of managers, practitioners and families.

Family hubs are one method of delivering early help. You can read more about this in the [Family Hubs and Early Help: an overview](#) module.

The [Early Help System Guide \(2022\)](#) provides information and guidance on implementing strategic partnerships to ensure that community support is effective and able to meet demand.

These organisations and institutions link together to form the Early Help system.



- **The importance of the VCFS in hub delivery**

The VCFS often acts as a safety net for those who fall outside the parameters for government or other public sector support. For example, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can find accommodation through voluntary sector organisations and food banks support people experiencing food insecurity. Furthermore, VCFS organisations can provide support for individuals who do not feel safe or comfortable engaging with organisations they see as authority figures.

VCFS organisations often support those experiencing:

- discrimination based on characteristics such as race, religion sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, disability, marriage or pregnancy
- unaffordable housing
- problem debt
- domestic violence
- poor mental health

The VCFS was particularly important during the coronavirus pandemic and difficult economic conditions. According to the [National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#), the use of voluntary sector services rose between March 2020 and December 2021 and continues to increase, while high inflation, rising running costs and reduced income create additional challenges. Local authorities should consider how to support VCFS organisations within the family hub network, so they can offer effective support.

Access and inclusion

A report by the [Early Intervention Foundation \(now Foundations\)](#) lack of cultural sensitivity in family support services. This has a major impact: [more than 40%](#) of research participants said the support they received made no difference or made things worse. The report also found that services are not always representative of the communities they work with, and practitioners often lacked understanding of cultural and religious influences on family dynamics.

Community-based, grassroots organisations are often better placed to engage families from minoritised ethnic groups. Including these organisations in hub development helps ensure hub services meet the community's needs, and that those from marginalised groups feel included in the hub's design and delivery. However, VCFS organisations need support to build their capacity – including support to evaluate the impact of their services.

Local authorities should take into account marginalised families' needs and ensure information about family hub services is accessible to them. For more information, please read our [Access and Inclusion](#) and [Participation, Service Design and Commissioning](#) modules.

The Faith Sector

Our [Faith Policy Briefing](#) (2023) makes a number of recommendations for integrating faith groups into family hubs.

Recommendations for the faith sector:

- Use the family hub guidance to articulate how your community can support families, and connect with your local authority or family hub.
- Reach out to your local authority to ask about family hub plans so that you know what's in development, and how your organisation could contribute to hub delivery.
- Cross reference referrals and signposting between faith organisations and family hub services.

Recommendations for local authorities:

- Identify faith organisations within the family hubs catchment area and invite faith leaders to participate in steering groups or partnership network meetings.
- Cross reference referrals and signposting between faith organisations' provision and family hub services.

The [Faith Covenant](#) is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement. These principles aim to increase trust between communities and local authorities, promoting open and practical working on all levels.

All local authorities and faith organisations that are part of a family hub network should adopt the Faith Covenant. To do so, [contact Faith Action](#).

Research Spotlight: Love Matters

In 2023, the Church of England published the report [Love Matters](#). The Commission outlined five guidelines to support and strengthen family life:

1. Value families in all their diversity
2. Support relationships throughout life
3. Honour singleness and single person households
4. Empower children and young people and recognise their agency
5. Build a kinder, fairer, more forgiving society

The report highlights that “churches of all denominations and other faith communities are heavily invested in their local communities” and recommends that the government make use of faith communities in the development and delivery of family hub services. Read the full [summary of the report](#).

Practice Spotlight: Food Poverty

Nearly [five million people](#) in the UK experienced food poverty in 2021-2022, including 12% of UK children.

Food insecurity is rarely an isolated issue. Families living in poverty are more likely to be referred to children’s social care (Bywaters et al, 2015), or have experience of [domestic violence](#), drug or alcohol dependence or mental or physical illness.

Addressing food poverty requires a joined-up approach – linking family hubs and the voluntary sector can deliver that. Leicestershire County Council worked closely with community organisations to set up, stock and maintain community fridges in their family hubs so families could access the support they need in one convenient, familiar location. Read more in our case study on [Leicestershire’s community fridges](#).

Involving the VCFS in family hub development

In line with the [family hub develop process](#) and [theory of change](#), VCFS organisations should form part of early family hub development and strategy. Map out the VCFS presence within your area to understand the local picture - for example, there may be one organisation that acts as an umbrella for a number of local VCFS groups.

As with all family hub development, involving children, young people, parents and carers will help you identify how the VCFS can best support them. For example, families may feel excluded from religious buildings that don’t correspond with their own faith or belief. These considerations should be taken into account during hub

planning and development. Also consider how VCFS organisations can support hub access, such as by increasing awareness of the services on offer.

Supporting integration of the VCFS into family hubs

Relationships

Local authorities are perceived to have more power, but VCFS organisations usually hold more trust within a community. Local authorities should value the community's trust in VCFS organisations, and listen to, value and respect all stakeholders. Implementing the [Lundy Model of Participation](#) is an effective way to check whether stakeholders are being heard and feel able to influence transformation and change.

Developing a Theory of Change

VCFS organisations are central to supporting families. Insight from VCFS partners will help to inform a Theory of Change, to ensure that services designed and delivered support families and improve outcomes. For more information, please read our [Theory of Change module](#).

Commissioning

Joint commissioning bridges gaps between organisations and provides clearer pathways through a hub's services. Some local authorities have used transformation funding to commission VCFS groups to lead on peer support because they have established relationships in the communities the hub seeks to serve. It is essential that VCFS organisations are part of formal commissioning within the family hub process. For more information, please read our [Co-production, service design and commissioning module](#).

Using national VCFS organisations

National VCFS organisations can support local authorities in accessing up to date and accurate information about specific needs. For example, children in care and care leavers accessing family hubs may be entitled to additional support. Charities such as [Become](#) support these children, young people and the professionals working with them.

Where there are no specialist services locally, national charities can also support children, young people and families. For example, the [Muslim Youth Helpline](#) is an accessible resource to support young people who may not feel able to talk to members of their family or community.

Data sharing

Having clear data sharing agreements between local authorities and VCFS organisations can support the review and evaluation of family hubs. Sharing data between services can enhance understanding of what works for children, young

people and their families. In addition, sharing data with VCFS organisations could support re-commissioning and increase the sustainability of services for families. For more information, please read our [Data Sharing module](#).

Shared training

VCFS organisations and family hubs should have access to shared training to develop common goals and language. Where possible, VCFS organisations should be aware of the local authority's practice model and receive training, for example, on restorative practice or Signs of Safety. Some local authorities opt for a reciprocal arrangement, where VCFS organisations are part of a training pool and share their specialist knowledge across social care services.

Safeguarding and accountability

VCFS organisations who are formally part of the family hub network should understand safeguarding procedures, and how they will be supported to ensure safeguarding and accountability.

One way to achieve this is to develop a family hub charter or a memorandum of understanding. This can act as a service level agreement. For more information on VCFS responsibilities, read the UK Government's guidance on [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023\)](#). The [NSPCC](#) also have guidance on writing safeguarding policies and procedures.

Using technology

Local authorities and many VCFS organisations will have a digital presence and may deliver services or support virtually. Digital services create opportunities both locally and regionally for partners to share systems, collaborate on projects and provide families with more integrated support.

At a national level, the Department for Education is developing a digital service to help families find and access support. This service will also allow professionals to connect the families they work with to other sources of VCFS or government support. The Department for Education expects to roll out this service to local authorities throughout 2024. For further information, please contact digital.FAMILYHUBS@education.gov.uk and read our [Digital and Virtual Family Hubs module](#).

Reflective Questions

- Are VCFS organisations part of your Theory of Change?
- How are they demonstrating the three family hub principles of access, connection and relationships?
- Are VCFS organisations part of your family hub governing boards?
- What influence do they have on decision-making?

- How are you managing safeguarding, access and inclusion issues consistently across VCFS partners in your family hub network?
- Has your local authority signed up to the Faith Covenant and what impact is it having? Are your local faith partners signed up to it too?
- Do you have an up-to-date list or map of all the VCFS organisations in your area? Are these available as part of your digital offer?
- Do you have a strategy for growing and maintaining capacity in your local VCFS sector?

Resources

Foundations (formerly Early Intervention Foundation): [What works to improve the lives of vulnerable children: A review of interventions for a local family help offer](#)

Keeping the Faith: <https://www.faithandsociety.org/resources/>

National Council for Voluntary Organisations: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/#/>

Early Help System Guide: [Early Help System Guide](#)

To search for a registered charity: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/results/page/2/delta/20/keywords/family>

Love Matters: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/families-and-households/love-matters-final-report-commission>

Faith and Society Covenant: <https://www.faithandsociety.org/covenant/>