

LSSI Postgraduate Researcher - Placement Opportunity

Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) is a charity that supports communities by helping people and organisations that do good in Leeds.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Leeds responded to the crisis by establishing a community-based and volunteer led emergency support response led by 27 ward-based community care hubs. These hubs provided food provision, prescription delivery, befriending and other local requests, such as dog walking, and engaged over 2,500 local volunteers. This hub network was developed out of the city's long-standing partnership between the third and public sectors and has been recognised nationally as effective practice.

As part of its developing delivery approach, the network is moving from a structure of 27 ward-level organisations with relatively few cross-neighbourhood links, to 5 groups of interlinked organisations operating across a larger geographical footprint.

While the community care network has attracted government support as a specific short-term Covid response, partners are excited by its potential to create a legacy of local third-sector/community ecosystems (organisations that collaborate at ground level, working with communities to identify and resolve challenges). Where this ambition is successful, it could be transformational for the people of Leeds.

The Placement Project:

The overall ambition of this project is to develop a suite of linked reports that make a contribution to third sector policy making in Leeds. We expect that the reports will build understanding of how this specific Covid response has:

- Delivered to meet the short-term needs of communities
- Developed new relationships between third sector organisations at neighbourhood level
- Potential to be developed and sustained in the mid – long –term as a networked approach to community asset building
- Impacted upon the debate around the best way to fund community based initiatives

Voluntary Action Leeds are looking for two PGRs to focus on the specific work streams below:

1. Statutory Partner Focus: Leeds City Council received significant funding from central government to support the Covid community response. This funding has been handed over to the Community Care Hub network via Voluntary Action Leeds. Compared to other funding programmes, there are relatively few delivery targets and a great degree of flexibility around how hubs can meet the needs of communities. This approach is a significant departure from typical funding arrangements that in general are considerably more prescriptive.

Community leadership and assets focus: the hubs were established to ensure certain needs for communities were met across the city during the pandemic. As an emergency response, partners recognise that there was less community co-production of the approach than they aspire to. The aspiration for the future of the hubs is that they embed the principles of Asset Based Community Development into how they develop themselves and their service in the future. The research will engage a group of community members at its outset to shape the approach. It is expected that it will undertake an enquiry into the community experience of hub services and community hopes and aspirations for how it will develop in the future.

Proposed timescales

The placement project is a maximum of 130 hours for each PGR, weekly hours are flexible and are to be agreed by the successful PGRs and the VAL team. There will be specific bi-weekly team meetings that the PGRs will be expected to attend. The projects start in April and finish in October 2021.

A rough timeline of activity is detailed below:

Phase 1: Project Development: 6 weeks (April – May)

- Steering group meeting to agree scope of project – organized by VA-L
- Engage with rest of project team to identify intra-study links and inform study design.
- Achieve ethical approval.
- Contact likely key participants introducing project and obtaining agreement to participate (VA-L)

Phase 2: Project Delivery: 8 weeks (June– Aug)

- Design study interviews
- Complete and analyse interviews
- Initial/interim findings: a brief 'policy paper' outlining high level initial findings to inform debate
- Steering group meeting

Phase 3: Analysing learnings: 8 -10 weeks (August – October)

- Write final report
- Prepare précis of learning from across all related studies
- Final Steering group meeting – organized by VA-L

No equipment will be provided so you will need to be able to access a laptop/computer and internet connection.

The successful candidate will be provided a bursary of £1950

The ideal candidate and skills required

- Understanding of and interest in the impacts of Covid on communities;
- Experience of coproduction;
- Strong qualitative research skills,
- Ability to work in a dynamic environment and engage with a range of partners, including high-level Council officers,
- High level of policy analytical awareness
- An understanding of the University of Leeds ethical procedures and be able to submit an ethical review in partnership with VAL to the University of Leeds Ethics team.

The anticipated benefits to the student's skills/experience

- The successful PGRs will be making a valuable contribution to the understanding of the impact of Covid on communities and the city system;
- Will gain a greater understanding of the voluntary sector, communities, and service delivery;
- An opportunity to engage with an innovative project that enables the third sector to work together in different ways;
- An opportunity to shape city policy for the future

If you are interested in applying for this placement position please send:

- CV
- Cover Letter – addressing how you meet the ideal candidate criteria
- Email or signature from your Supervisor that they are happy for you to undertake the placement

To LSSI Business Partnership Manager Hannah Crow H.E.Crow@leeds.ac.uk by **Friday 19th March** at 5pm.