



Create26

A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

Key note speaker: Kate Lee OBE, CEO of NCVO

Kate opened with a clear message: civil society is needed now more than ever. At a time when the sector is grappling with big questions - AI, funding pressures, changing public perceptions - she challenged delegates to focus on the role and value of civil society, and to build the evidence that proves why it matters.

Creating our future

Rather than “living in hope” that things will improve, Kate urged the sector to start creating its own future - not just for today’s organisations, but for future generations. “We are holding these organisations in trust,” she said, asking what we are doing now to ensure they remain strong and sustainable. The theme of Create felt timely: this isn’t about surviving hand-to-mouth, but building long-term resilience.

Creating space

She emphasised that innovation is already happening across the sector, but future-proofing isn’t a separate activity - it’s about everyday leadership. Not leadership as a title, but as choices: what we prioritise, what we protect, and what we are willing to change. Crucially, she challenged the sector to stop doing things too - to create space rather than endlessly layer more work. “Creativity isn’t about doing more - it’s about doing what matters with clarity and intention.”

Creative collaboration is our superpower

On collaboration, Kate offered a refreshingly honest perspective. While it can be powerful, not all collaboration works - and we must be brave enough to say so. She questioned whether time spent collaborating always leads to impact, especially when capacity is stretched. Where it does work best, she suggested, is often beyond the sector - bringing in new partners and perspectives. “Be creative in our collaboration,” she urged, calling it a sector superpower.



VCSE organisations need to be brave - not just in creating what next for your charity but also the sector. And to be honest, if creative change can’t happen in North Yorkshire, it can’t happen any where.

Kate Lee OBE, CEO, NCVO





Creativity isn't optional

She highlighted the scale of need - where a small proportion of the population accounts for the greatest demand - and made the case for closer partnership with government, with the VCSE sector involved from the outset. Creativity, she stressed, isn't optional: it's how the sector will reach new people, unlock funding and drive change. But creativity is about culture, not individuals - a culture where people can question, challenge and fail without fear.

The creative potential of AI

Kate also reflected on the rise of AI - its potential to improve efficiency, but also its risks, particularly around bias and how it may shape public perceptions of charities. "The question isn't whether we engage with these tools, but how," she said, urging the sector to bring communities along with it and think long term, beyond immediate pressures.

Creatively demonstrating our impact

The sector's economic and social value is significant and increasingly important to evidence, regardless of the political landscape. Drawing on robust research, such as the [New Philanthropy Capital report](#), it's clear the sector's contribution is comparable in scale to the financial sector. By better collating and presenting impact data, the sector can demonstrate how it is shifting social outcomes - and make a stronger, unified case to government for why it is essential in navigating and sustaining cultural change.

Our everyday creativity is inherent in our sector

Throughout, Kate recognised that much of the sector's work is unseen - but it is already creating and innovating every day. The question is whether that's happening intentionally, and with future generations in mind. She posed a powerful challenge: "If we had 24 years to save charities, what would we change today?"

Our sector creates a unique offer

Kate closed with a call for confidence and bravery - encouraging delegates to speak beyond the sector about its value. The VCSE sector, she argued, brings something unique: the ability to connect people and prevent them being left behind - something that ultimately saves cost and strengthens society.

Her final message was clear: be bold in shaping what comes next - for your organisation and for the sector. "If it can't happen in North Yorkshire," she said, "it can't happen anywhere."