

# South Hams Community Action

# Annual report

## 2023-24





**In March 2024, South Hams Community Action updated our strategic plan and revised our vision, mission and values.**

## Our Vision

Our vision is to strengthen our voluntary and community groups to enable them to support the health and wellbeing of people in the South Hams.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to be the leading organisation and partner of choice working on behalf of our voluntary and community sector.

## Our Values

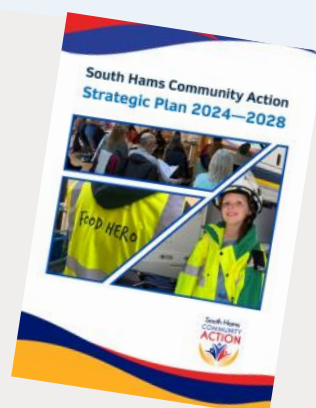
Our values are golden threads throughout all our work:

- Collaboration
- Trust
- Inclusivity
- Innovation

## Our strategic aims

- Partnerships: to create sustainable partnerships
- Capacity building: to build capacity in areas of unmet need
- Volunteering: enable our voluntary sector to better recruit and retain volunteers
- Health and wellbeing: to put the health and wellbeing needs of our communities first and foremost.

Our strategic aims are inter-connected and require a joined-up approach. It is vital that we work in partnership to enhance the health and wellbeing outcomes for our communities.





It is our pleasure to present to you our South Hams Community Action Annual Report for the year April 2023 to March 2024.

We started this year as South Hams Community & Voluntary Services and ended the year as South Hams Community Action. In March, we had an interim Chief Executive Officer until Jackie Wesley became our Chief Executive Officer in August 2023. But, throughout these changes, the dedication and immense hard work of our team members has remained constant.

It was another year where our support to community and voluntary groups, as well as our wellbeing support to individuals, was needed more than ever. The role of community and voluntary groups in our communities across South Hams District has also become increasingly important as cutbacks are made to services. It is a worrying time for many of our voluntary organisations with more competition for ever-tightening funding streams and an ongoing shortage of volunteers.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the funders and partners of South Hams Community Action: especially South Hams District Council for its ongoing support, all the town and parish councils which have supported us, South Hams Primary Care Network and Mewstone Primary Care Network, the West Local Care Partnership, as well as Devon County Council, and funding organisations including Livewell Southwest, the National Lottery, the Clare Milne Trust and Devon Community Foundation.

Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank the South Hams Community Action staff team for all their tireless work and commitment, and the Board of Trustees for all their support to our organisation throughout the year.

Penny Elghady  
Chair of Trustees to August 2024

Tim Peters  
Interim Chair of Trustees

# Our communities and groups



**“I feel you have been worth a lot more to us than £60 in the last 12 months! Training, advice, the funding day, opportunities for networking and sharing ideas and ways of working at forums and events, collegiate support from your team, support with a local social policy issue around dementia....it really feels like South Hams Community Action has grown—and is growing into something really useful. You are asking and listening and putting that into action.**

**The recent research around social isolation has also been useful for funding bids, all of which is so helpful to us as an organisation and me as a professional. Often in small charities we are doing so many tasks and delivering services and keeping our plates spinning, it is good to feel understood.”**

**Susanne Archard,  
South Brent & District  
Caring**



Our team has worked tirelessly to support, new, emerging and existing groups, organisations and charities to grow and flourish.

Working extensively with partners throughout the South Hams, the team has promoted collaboration and effective joined-up working in support of our communities.

## Survey of our voluntary and community sector

Between May and June 2023, our team carried out a survey of our voluntary and community sector to better understand their needs and priorities. We received 50 responses.

Volunteer recruitment and retention was the top priority for our sector, followed by funding. Training, marketing and communications, policies and governance were also priorities for our groups. They also needed HR, IT and finance support.

Following our voluntary and community sector survey, we have been working on a range of training offers. So far, these have included training on grant funding, mental health awareness, disability awareness, and a HOPE (Help Overcome Problems Effectively) course. Our team also referred groups to training being undertaken by various partner organisations.

We are currently progressing other affordable training

# Evidencing need Creating change

In 2023-24, South Hams Community Action assessed and evidenced the priorities for our groups to target our work to meet their needs.

## VCSE survey

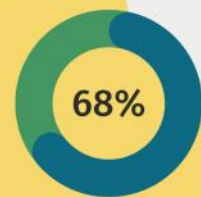
In 2023 we undertook a survey of our voluntary and community sector. 50 groups responded to provide information on their priorities and needs.



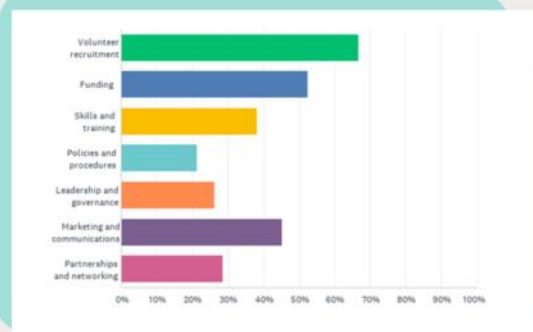
50

## Priorities

The top priority for our voluntary and community groups was **volunteer recruitment**, which was an urgent need for many groups.



Other priority areas included **funding and sustainability, training and skills, marketing and communications, governance and policies.**





**“South Hams Community Action’s work on loneliness and social isolation in the South Hams has highlighted the very real impact of social isolation, particularly for our rural communities.**

**Many of our VCSE Assembly organisations are now considering work to evidence the needs of socially isolated residents in their communities, and South Hams Community Action is supporting them with information and advice.**

**This is important work which is adding to our understanding of the needs of our local populations across Devon.”**

Diana Crump, Chair,  
Devon VCSE Assembly



offers—online or face-to-face to provide the flexibility our voluntary groups need.

Following the survey, we organised a free Funding Day in November 2023 where over 60 participants from South Hams community and voluntary organisations were able to meet a range of local and national funding bodies.

The day was a great success, and we are holding a similar event in November 2024 to support our groups to recruit and retain volunteers, which is the top priority identified by our voluntary sector.

## Loneliness and social isolation survey

Between November 2023 and early March 2024, the team surveyed residents in the South Hams to learn more about loneliness and social isolation, particularly with the rurality of the South Hams.

Our team visited groups, cafés, post offices, community shops and pubs, and worked in partnership with many of our voluntary organisations.

The 223 responses showed that the picture was stark for our lonely and socially isolated residents, with transport and mental health being the top barriers to attending activities. Cost, timings and health were other leading factors.

We are taking forward work on the identified barriers.

# Loneliness and social isolation

From November 2023 to March 2024, we surveyed residents to find out more about loneliness and social isolation in the South Hams.

## Evidencing need

We collaborated with our voluntary and community groups on a four-month project to survey need in relation to social isolation and loneliness in the South Hams.

223 residents responded. The top barriers to reducing social isolation were transport and mental health.

**Evidence is essential to enable grant funding support**



223



The survey findings enable our voluntary sector to evidence need when undertaking funding applications. It also informs our capacity building work.



## A Caring **connection**

We work with our caring organisations and with strategic partners in key areas of need.

### People with disabilities

Our attendance at two people with disabilities Job Centre events identified a need for more volunteering opportunities for people with disabilities in the South Hams. We are working with our voluntary sector and partners to meet this need.



**Caring  
communities**



### Our Ukrainian community

In partnership with South Hams District Council and a Ukrainian residents' steering group, we arranged and facilitated four consultation events in Kingsbridge, Ivybridge, Dartmouth and Totnes engaging with over 50 people. The aim was to find out about the issues our Ukrainian residents have encountered and what is needed to create a more resilient community.



**50**

### Collaborations

In addition to our local Caring Alliances—the Erme & Yealm and Kingsbridge & District—the first district-wide Caring Alliance meeting was organised in October 2023.

This was attended by over 30 participants from a range of organisations to hear from a local caring organisation and strategic partners.

Our team also attended and supported a range of partner-led meetings throughout the South Hams and Devon. These included:

- Dementia-Friendly Communities/the Four Rivers Alliance
- The Mental Health Alliance
- The West Local Care Partnership
- The Healthy Ageing Board (West)
- Carers subgroup (West)
- Young People and Mental Health Subgroup (West)
- The South Local Care Partnership
- Multi-Agency Team (patient needs)
- South Devon Dementia Support Forum
- The South Devon MP's roundtable meeting for caring organisations.
- The Devon VCSE Assembly.

We are looking to develop additional partnerships and collaborations to benefit our voluntary and community sector.



## Our capacity building work

Working with our Health and Wellbeing team, and our partners, the communities team use their knowledge of the South Hams to build innovative solutions to tackle the unmet needs in our communities.

We have supported many groups on a one-to-one basis with their funding, volunteer or governance needs.

The work undertaken includes supporting our community transport schemes to find drivers and our caring organisations to recruit a range of volunteers, in particular befrienders.

Since Covid, it has proved more challenging for groups to find volunteers, so our team has worked with a range of partner organisations to develop new opportunities for volunteering—including people with disabilities (which will benefit both groups and the individuals) and corporate volunteering.

## Ukrainian community support

Supported by funding from South Hams District Council, we have partnered with a wide range of community groups, organisations and agencies to provide both direct and holistic support, information and advice to those displaced by the war in Ukraine, and to families hosting Ukrainian refugees.

## Our Caring organisations

We work with our caring organisations and with strategic partners to lever change for our communities.

## Our Alliances

60



In addition to our two local caring alliances, we created a district-wide alliance to enable voluntary and community organisations to connect with strategic partners and each other. Over 60 groups have participated in the alliances.



**Caring organisations at the heart of caring communities**



100

We attended and supported over 100 community groups, events and activities to support work taking place in our communities.

# Information and support for our groups

We connect groups to each other, to funders, volunteers, sources of information and advice.

## Funding day



In November 2023, we ran a free funding day to enable 60 organisations to meet and learn from six grant funding bodies.

60

## Information bulletins

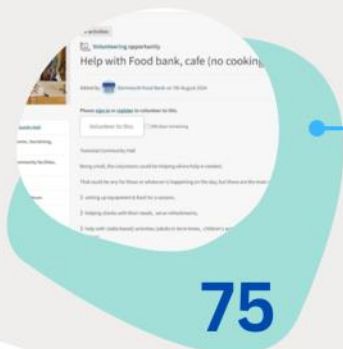
Over 300 VCSE organisations and partners received regular bulletins providing a wealth of information including funding, partner updates and more.



300

## Devon Connect

Over 75 groups were encouraged to promote over 200 activities and volunteering opportunities on the Devon Connect platform – [devonconnect.org](https://devonconnect.org).



75

More recently, the support for our Ukrainian community has moved to creating more resilience and enabling better integration, while encouraging them to celebrate their own cultural identity.

Looking forward, plans are being developed to increase our voluntary sector capacity in areas such as reducing social isolation, to enhance the mental wellbeing of all age groups, and to support our carers and those living with dementia.

## Ivybridge community connector

The Ivybridge community connector role was funded by LiveWell and Ivybridge Town Council to work in Ivybridge and the surrounding parishes.

The role supported health and wellbeing groups and also the Town Council's priorities.

This included the young people's partnership and Ivybridge youth forum; working with Resilient Lives to find premises and gain support for wellbeing projects including young people and men's mental health.

Work also included supporting the food hub project together with Feeding Devon and organising and coordinating meetings for potential supporters. Also, volunteer support and engagement.

There was also support for the Wellbeing Collaboration and other groups who were looking



to develop projects or work in Ivybridge and the local areas.

## Peer-support project

This work was funded by the West Local Care Partnership to develop a range of person-centred and health-based peer-support groups.

From early to mid 2024, the work focused on reducing social isolation. More recently, the team has moved to supporting health-based peer support.

## Other support for groups

In addition to the one-to-one support, information and signposting provided around grant funding, policies and legal structures, our team has also publicised the needs of our voluntary and community groups.

This has been undertaken in mailings, social media, the creation of posters and other publicity, and in articles in local newsletters and magazines.



## Support and training for our groups

In 2023-24, South Hams Community Action worked with over 200 groups to actively meet the needs of our voluntary sector.

## Support and advice

We provided more than 100 voluntary and community social enterprise (VCSE) organisations with development support and advice, which included advice on volunteering, legal structures, governance and fundraising.

100



Our support for our groups



## Training

We offered training in areas such as grant funding, safeguarding, mental health awareness and disability awareness. We also ran a HOPE course (help overcome problems effectively) for individuals.





# Our residents' health and wellbeing

Our health and wellbeing team works with individuals on a one-to-one basis.

## Social prescribing

We have five social prescribers working in Chillington, Dartmouth, Kingsbridge, Modbury, Salcombe, and Wembury & Yealmpton.

Our social prescribers take referrals from GP practices.



**Reducing social isolation and improving mental health**



## Community link working

Our new community link worker supports people on a one-to-one basis and also with buddying support, IT training, form filling and an online peer-support groups.



# Health & wellbeing

**Our health and wellbeing team makes a real difference in our communities and to their many clients.**

Working closely with the South Hams and Mewstone Primary Care Networks, our Local Care Partnerships, and the wider voluntary sector, the team provides well-being support to those that need it most.

The social prescribers reduce demand on GP surgeries and

**"I have to admit you were a blessing to me when you were here. Sorting me out! Firstly, thank you for the scooter info. I will read it thoroughly shortly.**

**Secondly, big shocker! I do go out for little walks in the village! I usually go to the memorial garden in the afternoon and meet up with either a very elderly gentleman, and natter about anything and everything or others join in too..."**

Social prescribing client who is no longer lonely and isolated

provide a caring service for our vulnerable and lonely residents.

In addition to their one-to-one work, they have a wealth of knowledge about local groups and services, so they can signpost and refer residents in need of additional support.

It was through the work of our social prescribing team – and feedback from partner organisations – that the need for a community link worker role was identified. This new role was recruited in December and the community link worker started working with referrals in January 2024.

Referrals are currently taken from the NHS for hospital discharge support, social care, the police, voluntary groups and other agencies.

The community link worker works on a one-to-one basis with clients and can be their buddy when being introduced to activities/groups; undertakes IT training (particularly around social connectivity) and form filling; and develops peer-support groups to reduce social isolation.

Importantly, the community link worker helps groups to develop their own buddy support schemes.

Due to their work, the health and wellbeing team can evidence gaps in provision, which is then disseminated to the communities team who can take forward the identified needs. This ensures that our teams are able to provide a more supportive environment to our voluntary sector and communities.

## Health and wellbeing our team's work

There is a high demand for our health and wellbeing team's support services

### Social prescribing



334

341 people were referred to our social prescribing link workers with 334 people engaging with support, each offered up to six sessions (and on occasions more) per client.

Our social prescribers signpost to approximately 124 different community groups and organisations.

Our social prescribers refer to approximately 46 different community groups and organisations and have made over 300 direct referrals to community and voluntary organisations in the South Hams.



300

### Community link working



8

Our new Community Link Worker started undertaking referrals in January 2024. By the end of March, she had undertaken eight referrals and also set up buddy schemes in two groups.

# Social prescribing case studies

## from Mewstone and South Hams Primary Care Networks

**“For the first time ever, this time when I got ill I couldn’t see myself getting better. But since I met you I feel I will get better and I feel very excited about that prospect.”**

87 year old client of our  
community link worker

### These are just a few of the people our team has helped:

- An 83-year-old gentleman with depression and other health conditions, including diabetes. In his sessions he discussed alienation from some of his children, and poor sleep. He was also feeling isolated. Good sleep hygiene was discussed with him, to see if he could improve his sleep and he was signposted to several local groups. He enjoyed walking at times, so he was linked into Nordic walking, and we went with him for his first walk. He then met with the walking lead at a coffee morning group to also introduce him to the coffee morning group, and we were also able to introduce him to a gentleman neighbour who had also started the Nordic walking. We discussed his safety at home, and we signposted him to the fire service for their checks, and we talked about personal alarms. We liaised with the diabetes nurse to obtain support for him around his diet and for podiatry. He fed back to us that he was much happier following our work together.
- A gentleman where his key needs were highlighted as mental health, loneliness and isolation. He had been referred before but hadn’t engaged. However, this time he appeared very motivated. His interests were discussed, which strongly included gardening. We signposted him to Kingsbridge community garden’s volunteer sessions, a life composting course, Slapton Leyfield Centre and Kingsbridge in Bloom. During his time, he engaged with the life composting course, and we contacted them and arranged for them to meet him before the course, to support his confidence to attend. He signed up for further sessions with them when the course completed, and to the volunteering gardening group. He said afterwards that his social anxiety was improving, and he was feeling more relaxed.
- A lady who had moved to Devon two years ago and had a long-term mental health condition. She has become socially isolated, which had worsened as she’d lost her confidence driving due to mobility issues. We had to adapt the way we worked together as this lady had to work shifts, so we corresponded a great deal by email. Due to this lady’s health condition, we discussed applying for a blue badge and we discussed refresher driving lessons to help her to build her confidence driving. It was challenging finding activities that could be available around her shifts, but we were able to find a few groups which she could drop in and out of, where there would be no pressure to attend including a pop-up choir and mental health drop in. We also discussed some online courses and groups that might work well for her. By the end of our time together, she had received her blue badge, was growing in confidence driving, and looking forward to trying some of the activities discussed. She said that her confidence was growing, and she was taking each day as it came.



# Our work and plans 2024 onwards

With the development of our new strategic plan—and the surveys to review the needs of our voluntary and community groups and loneliness and social isolation in the South Hams—we are developing new work streams to meet the needs of our groups and residents.

Like many of our voluntary groups—we are facing funding cuts. This led to redundancies being made in May 2024, with the loss of three hardworking team members. It also meant that we have little choice but to recover some of our costs when working with groups. Previously, we have offered free advice and support to all. This support is still available to our members, as we have reviewed and improved our membership offer.

For our groups, we are reviewing our training offer. In particular, we are currently working on a platform to provide a range of online training courses—many certified. We are also developing other course provision including generic volunteer induction courses, which will be available at lower cost to our members. We have introduced a fortnightly funding newsletter and we also offer priority places to members for our online and face-to-face funding and volunteer sessions.

Our priority is to meet the evidenced needs of our groups, either by offering more funding support sessions, volunteer engagement advice and connection, or by investigating other provision such as HR, finance or IT support services.

Our work around loneliness and social isolation has evidenced needs around transport and mental health provision.

We are shortly starting work on a transport survey, partnering with voluntary groups and parishes to evidence need. We then plan to work on the identified need and build transport capacity. The survey can also be used by our community transport groups when applying for funding.

One of our roles—the community link worker—is also supporting a new mental health drop-in service in Ivybridge. We plan to do more work to support mental health provision in the South Hams.

We are also developing more health-focused peer-support groups, particularly in the rural parishes.

Another priority is to develop more volunteering opportunities for people with disabilities and to encourage corporate volunteering to meet the needs of our groups.

Importantly, we also need to evidence the rural deprivation in the South Hams. Currently, many funding streams use deprivation data that is based on concentrated population areas. This further disadvantages our residents in rural communities, as funding is targeted towards deprivation in towns and completely ignores the impact of rurality.

A huge amount of work is being undertaken by our small but dedicated team, who want to make a real difference to people's lives in the South Hams.

**South Hams Community Action is always grateful to receive funding support to enable us to continue our work with our voluntary sector and residents.**

**We would like to extend our gratitude to the groups and organisations which have supported us:**

Apple Corporation/Benevity  
Bigbury Parish Council  
Brixton FEOFEES Trust  
Brixton Parish Council  
Counselling Connection  
Dartmouth Caring  
Devon and Cornwall  
Police and Crime Commissioner  
Devon Breathers  
Devon Carers  
Devon Community Foundation  
Devon County Council  
Devon Mental Health Alliance  
Devon Voluntary Action  
Ermington Parish Council  
Harberton Parish Council  
Holbeton Parish Council  
Ivybridge Caring  
Ivybridge Town Council  
Kingsbridge Care Hub  
Kingsbridge & Saltstone Caring  
Leechwell Gardens Association  
Livewell Southwest  
Loddiswell Community Hub  
Mewstone Primary Care Network

Misses Barrie Charitable Trust  
Modbury Caring  
Modbury Parish Council  
Moorvision  
Next Steps Together  
Rattery Parish Council  
South Brent & District Caring  
South Brent Parish Council  
South Hams District Council  
South Hams Primary Care Network  
Staverton Parish Council  
The Claire Milne Trust  
The Elmgrant Trust  
The Motherborn Collective CIC  
The National Lottery  
The Norman Family Charitable Trust  
Totnes Caring  
Totnes Town Council  
Ugborough Parish Council  
Wembury Caring  
Westbank  
West Local Care Partnership  
Yealmpton & Brixton Community  
Friendship  
Yealmpton Parish Council



South Hams Community Action is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. We were established in 1995 and have been serving voluntary and community organisations in the South Hams for approximately thirty years. We are a core member of Devon Voluntary Action (DeVA), under whose umbrella we are also members of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

**Through collaboration with strategic partners and our voluntary sector, South Hams Community Action works to make a real difference to residents' lives in the South Hams.**