

# South Hams Community Action

## Update on our work in the South Hams

The work undertaken at South Hams Community Action includes support for both our voluntary and community sector and for individuals.

### Voluntary and community groups

We offer advice, support and guidance to voluntary and community groups in the South Hams.

This includes training, events, support with governance or legal structures.

We also evidence need which enables our voluntary organisations to demonstrate the true picture when applying to funding organisations. This also means that we can better target our capacity building work to meet identified gaps in provision.

We have recently reintroduced a membership offer. In just six weeks we have over 20 groups who have signed up or indicated that they will be joining.

### Individuals

Our work with individuals includes support from our social prescribers and community link worker. Our social prescribers have worked with around 300 individuals in one year, while our community link worker has helped 28 individuals in just seven months.

We also undertake training for individuals, including the HOPE (help overcome problems effectively) programme; digital inclusion including IT training; support for a new mental health drop-in service; and peer support groups.

### Contents

- Our membership offer
- Training
- Meet the funder sessions
- Volunteer engagement event
- Volunteer recruitment
- Supporting our Ukrainian community
- Digital inclusion
- Peer-support groups
- Loneliness and social isolation report—the next steps (including our transport survey)
- People with disabilities
- Social prescribers
- Our new community link worker

Personally, I feel you have been worth a lot more to us than £60 [membership] 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 SH 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*



## Membership offer

South Hams Community Action has been re-viewing its membership offer to groups.

In addition to a fortnightly newsletter with funding information and priority invitations to events and training, we are looking at bulk-buying services and training for our voluntary sector organisations.

This will enable our voluntary sector to source provision such as training or HR at a vastly more cost-effective rate.

## Training

In addition to the online certified training (currently in progress), our team is currently running training sessions for groups and individuals. This includes safeguarding, disability awareness, dementia awareness and HOPE courses.

Our new volunteer induction courses are starting in the autumn. These will enable our voluntary organisations' volunteers to receive best-practice training which includes safeguarding, policies, health and safety, boundaries, data protection, social media, equality and diversity and wellbeing.

## Meet the funder sessions

Following on from the successful Funding Day, we have arranged the first of our 'meet the funder' online sessions.

Spaces on these free sessions will be prioritised to members in the first instance.



I really appreciated the session and learned a lot. I feel I have a better chance of coping than before. And I am so grateful for your time.

*Yealmpton digital inclusion session attendee*

The first session is being held in October with speakers from local funders Devon Community Foundation and Livewell Foundation.

Future sessions will include other funders and the National Lottery when the new funding programme is agreed.

## Volunteer engagement event

A volunteer engagement event is being held in November at Follaton House, Totnes. The event will enable our voluntary sector to hear from a range of organisations on a range of topics including:

**Human Resources:** avoiding potential pitfalls when recruiting volunteers and best practice for retention and reward.

**People with disabilities:** enabling people with disabilities to volunteer—and the benefits and support available for organisations and people with disabilities.

**Policies/procedures:** what policies should an organisation have and procedures should be followed. Volunteering best practice for our sector.

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*

**Volunteer recruitment:** how to engage with potential volunteers—a presentation on successful volunteer recruitment practices.

**Social media and communications training session:** how to engage with potential volunteers on social media, the types of social media and audiences, and how to plan a communication campaign.

A range of organisations will also be on hand—including those supporting people with disabilities or offering corporate volunteers—to provide information and advice.

## Volunteer recruitment

Our team is communicating the need for volunteers on an ongoing basis through social media, local newsletters and magazines and encouraging our voluntary section to publicise their opportunities on our volunteering platform, Devon Connect.

## Supporting the Ukrainian community

In partnership with South Hams District Council, South Hams Community Action has been supporting our Ukrainian residents with information, advice and activities.

Recently, this support has focused on enabling our Ukrainian residents to become more resilient and to integrate with their own communities, while maintaining their own cultural identities.

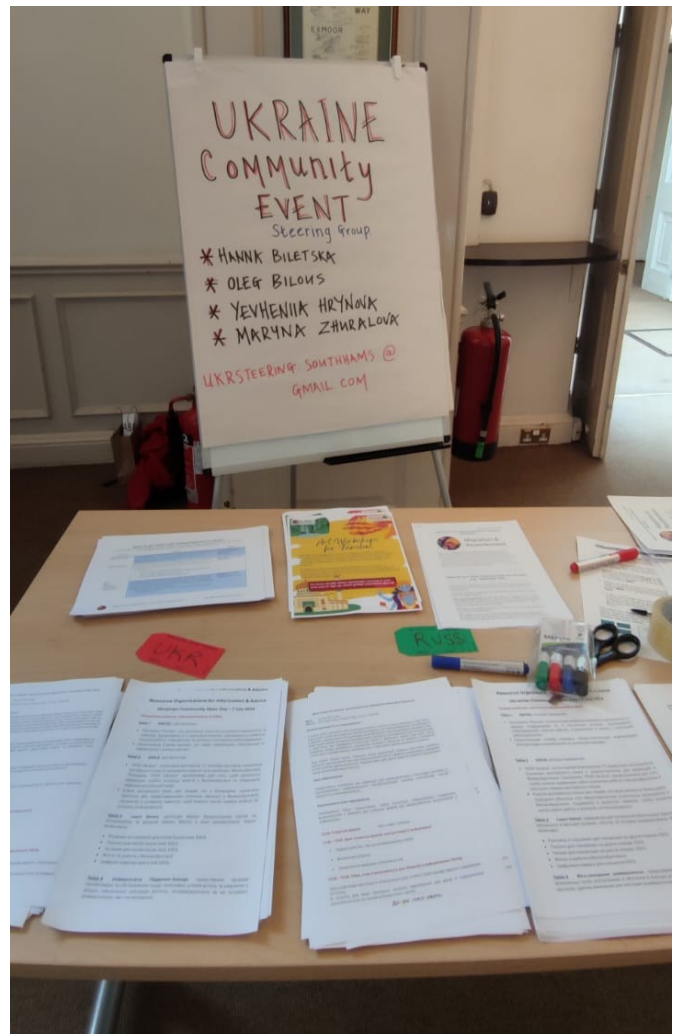
Four consultations events have been held, which culminated in an event—led by the Ukrainian district-wide steering group—which was held at SHDC’s Follaton House in July. Over 100 attendees, including their families, met a range of organisations including housing, benefit, employment and education services.

## Digital inclusion

A number of digital inclusion sessions have taken place in Yealmpton, following requests by residents. These are in addition to the one-to-one training offered by our community link worker.

## Peer-support groups

South Hams Community Action is being fund-



*The event at Follaton House in July was led by the Ukrainian steering group, in partnership with South Hams District Council and South Hams Community Action.*



ed by the West Local Care Partnership to develop health-based peer-support sessions focusing on heart, cancer and mental health support for young people.

### **Mental health drop-in sessions**

Our team is partnering with the VCSE Mental Health Alliance to facilitate and support mental health drop-in sessions in Ivybridge, which are due to start in September.

### **Loneliness and social isolation report—the next steps**

Our recent loneliness and reducing social isolation survey was undertaken in the latter part of 2023 to the spring of 2024. This important survey has enabled us to raise awareness of the issue of social isolation, particularly for our rural communities.

The report findings have been disseminated to strategic partners, parishes, and to the voluntary sector (who can also use the information to assist their funding applications).

The survey identified two areas that were seen as the top barriers to reducing social isolation and loneliness:

- Transport (for both face-to-face and remote/online responses)

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 ... I'm doing a lot of Diamond Painting now, plus I've just started a cot (patchwork) quilt for a young couple having their first baby 28th March. I've had loads of knitted things made for them too. They're only young and not got much money....

*Social prescribing client who is no longer lonely and isolated*

- Mental health (for online/remote responses).

Our priority is to work on both these barriers and to develop solutions.

As part of this, we are starting work on a **district-wide transport survey** in the autumn 2024. Recently, we have asked parishes to collaborate with us on this important piece of work—and many have already given positive responses.

This survey can be used by community groups to evidence need to funders, by parishes and strategic partners to support their work in their communities, and by us for our capacity building work.

### **People with disabilities**

After our team attended two “people with disabilities Job Centre events”, we recognised that there were limited volunteering opportunities for people with disabilities. Yet our voluntary sector struggles to find volunteers and many people with disabilities would like to volunteer.

We are working with our groups and partners to develop training and support for groups to enable people with disabilities to volunteer. It is vital that we provide these opportunities, as this reduces social isolation and also provides people with disabilities with skills and opportunities for future employment.

Recently, South Hams Community Action has become a disability confident employer.

### **Social prescribing team**

Our five social prescribers cover Chillington, Dartmouth, Norton Brook (Kingsbridge), Modbury, Wembury and Yealmpton medical centres.

Between them, in the past year they have undertaken over 300 referrals, which has enormously benefitted residents in our local communities.

Referrals to our social prescribing team are via GP practices. In turn, social prescribers undertake around six sessions with each client and refer or signpost to groups and activities, or support services.

## Our new community link worker

The community link worker role was created following specific needs identified within the South Hams. This was evidenced by our social prescribing team—who could not offer specific services—and other partners who were unable to find help for vulnerable and lonely individuals.

We were able to source funding for a 20-hour per week role in the west of the district. The Community link worker started taking referrals in January for this more holistic service which includes:

- One-to-one support. When the individual feels ready, the community link worker will initially attend activities with the person, as anxiety about attending activities alone can be a substantial factor in social isolation.
- The community link worker also encourages groups to develop and promote their own buddy schemes.
- In addition, the role supports individuals with their IT training needs. This can be around social media, so they can Facetime their families, or shopping or grants—so they can become more independent.
- We are also looking at peer-support for isolated individuals—particularly housebound residents.

Referrals are from groups, social care, home from hospital discharge teams and the police. We would like to move to friends and family or self-referrals in the future,

In just seven months our community link worker has already helped 28 individuals—with an average of six sessions per person.

Her work includes:

- Setting up two buddy schemes in local community groups—which will provide long-term benefits for people who are anxious about attending new activities unaccompanied.
- Helping a highly isolated lady become more confident and then buddying her into an art therapy class for people with anxiety and prior addiction issues. After attending, the client was asked to lead a couple of the classes as she has prior ex-

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*

perience teaching art. The client now feels 'valued and needed for first time in a long time'.

- Assisting a elderly couple in an isolated area who were struggling financially and socially, especially since a recent diagnosis of sight loss. Also, helping them to be awarded benefits they were unaware about and introducing them to the Sensory team. Now they feel more supported and have been given visual aids which have improved their lives.
- Supporting an 87 year old lady with mobility issues, who was unable to navigate the steep roads in her area. In addition to accompanying her to activities and groups, including the Uni of the 3rd age, the link worker has taught the lady some basic IT skills to enable her to join an online group of Quakers—which was very important to her. Recently the lady said, '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.'
- Successfully supporting a Ukrainian 'single' mum integrate into her local community, especially the Ukrainian community. This has really widened her support network and her feeling of belonging.
- Helping an isolated villager apply for a disability scooter, helping her to attend more coffee meetings with her friends.
- Supporting a lady in her late 80s to integrate into her local community which is actually bustling with activities and support for somebody like her. She was unaware of all of the events that were so local to her, and cried with joy when told. With buddy support she attended a coffee morning where she has really connected

with a group of ladies. This client is affected by early onset dementia and the regularity she is seen has made a lot of difference. She didn't ever think that she would make new friends at her age—but she has. The link worker has also arranged for a driver who is now able to regularly collect her and take her to see her friends at a singing group.

- Supporting an elderly gentleman who was isolated and struggling with his finances.
- Working alongside a middle-aged gentleman with severe anxiety and COPD. He was nervous about attending groups in case he had a bad turn with his COPD. He was accompanied to groups and then linked into a group's new buddy system so that he felt calmer when attending. The link worker also spoke to him about some relaxing techniques which could help with his breathing.

- Working with a young girl pregnant with twins who needed introductions to community services and groups. Helping her bid for a house which she moved into three weeks ago!
- Enabling a lady to become less reliant on neighbours by learning how to undertake her shopping online.
- Supporting a male carer and his elderly mum. The carer was depressed but being buddied into walking football and a gardening group has really helped him.

The need is such that we now have a waiting list for community link support, which isn't beneficial for lonely and isolated people. Not only do we need to fund the continuation of this role, but we are also looking at increasing the role's hours and/or sourcing funding for an additional role.



**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.**

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