



HEREFORDSHIRE TOGETHER FUND

PROGRAMME REPORT

Inspiring stories of community, collaboration and cohesion



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About Herefordshire Community Foundation

The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) is a local, independent grant-making charity founded in 2002 to support communities and individuals in need across Herefordshire. HCF utilises donor-invested funds (such as George's Fund), donations, trust transfers, and program-specific funding to positively impact the lives of vulnerable, isolated, and disadvantaged people, with a primary focus on those living in Herefordshire.

HCF supports charities, voluntary organisations, and community groups that deliver public benefit to the broader community, as well as providing grants to individuals and families in need.

Since its inception, HCF has distributed over £8,00,000 throughout Herefordshire, creating meaningful change and improving lives.

About Healthwatch Herefordshire

Healthwatch Herefordshire is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Herefordshire.

Their role is to identify what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need. They ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear the people's voice and use feedback to improve care. They also help people find the information they need about local services.

About Herefordshire Together

Herefordshire Together Fund was envisioned as a Community Paradigm for community-led projects. The aim was to make lasting, meaningful connections for people to improve their emotional wellbeing to provide intergenerational opportunities and to strengthen reach to families in need.

In 2024, Herefordshire Community Foundation took on the governance of the Herefordshire Together grants programme, as part of the community chest (paradigm) on behalf of Healthwatch Herefordshire and funded by Public Health at Herefordshire Council.

The programme awarded £136,364 in grants to community projects to increase connections for people to improve individual resilience and wellbeing. e.g. reducing isolation, loneliness, increasing support for children & families through connections. Grants awarded were up to £1000 or between £1,000 and £20,000.

Awards were made to 12 projects which met either or both of two priorities

Priority 1: Creating lasting meaningful connections for people to improve emotional wellbeing and sense of community belonging

Priority 2: Strengthen reach to families in need

These priorities support the 10-year health & wellbeing priorities in Herefordshire.

Priority 1	Priority 2
Reduce loneliness & isolation	Reduction in number of children experiencing neglect
Increase connections through community activity	Reduction in number of children with experience of trauma or adverse childhood experiences
Increase connections through intergenerational activity	Greater number of parents supported to develop healthy parenting routines and behaviours
Increase connections through nature, greenspace and arts	Increase number of children, who experience disadvantage, to have community based support
Increase peer support for emotional wellbeing	

Healthwatch Herefordshire engaged with grantees to support networking opportunities, share gaps in need and address them collectively and foster co-production for delivery, the aim of which was to strength community resilience for individuals, organisations, and cultivate a robust and stronger VCSE sector.

What is a community paradigm?

The public service models of the last 60 years are broken and a new approach, identified by Healthwatch Herefordshire, is working in partnership with communities.

They recognise that public sector services cannot create a system large enough to meet current or future demand. Communities should be encouraged to work in a 'community paradigm' to reduce demand, intervene sooner with community-led solutions, and invest in prevention for better wellbeing outcomes.

What does creating Community Power mean?

The Community Paradigm describes a relationship and partnership between the state and communities.

In March 2023, Herefordshire committed to a system partnership across a range of sectors to develop its approach to a community paradigm shift. This would be a 10-year long-term way of working with communities, giving them power and resources to achieve community-led approaches that deliver prevention and develop resilient communities.

Healthwatch Herefordshire has brought together key partners in the Council, Health and the VCSE, building an alliance model that has formed the Herefordshire Together program. Tackling health inequalities in the short term and prevention for the longer term. Herefordshire Together is at the heart of supporting the Herefordshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and driving forward fresh, innovative ways of working.

- Involving communities and the wider workforce.
- Looking at new ways of working, building community wealth for all the residents.
- Engagement at a very local level of neighbourhoods.
- A shared 'community chest' approach with proportionate governance and some high-level outcomes, to deliver community-led prevention.
- An alternative to traditional commissioning and procurement processes that stimulates community solutions, innovation, and grassroots capacity building.
- A co-produced prevention plan for the area of benefit focusing on the advancement of health and relief for those in need.

What is a community chest?

A community chest is a shared investment fund that combines money from the NHS, local authorities, and other sources, such as philanthropy and local business.

It is more than just a pot of money. Community Chests are rooted in a collaborative, needs-led approach to funding that taps into the strengths and insights of a wide range of partners (health, local government, businesses and acute trusts) from across Herefordshire.

In January 2024, the first tranche of Community Chest funding was launched, made possible by our colleagues in the Public Health Department of Herefordshire County Council. Approximately £136,000 in public health funding was dedicated to a grant pot supporting prevention and grassroots initiatives.

Organisations received both core and project funding, enabling them to explore new initiatives while also sustaining their existing work. This approach stood out by being flexible and responsive to what communities needed most.



Hereford Community Farm supports planting at St Martin's Food Share

The following table provides a summary of the projects funded by Herefordshire Together.

Name	Project	Project Outline	Award	Number of beneficiaries
Hope Support Services	Hope in Herefordshire Family Support	Staff costs for youth work in Hereford, Ross-on-Wye and Leominster and two family days	£15,612.00	260
Connexus Homes Ltd	Brierley Court Community Garden	Creation of a community garden through inter-generational activities.	£1000,00	16
Ross-on-Wye Community Development Trust (Ross CDT)	Ross CDT Core Funding	Staff, volunteer training and operational costs.	£15,000.00	200
Hereford Community Farm CIC	Routes of Connection	Community and family events.	£19,060.00	600
Age UK Wyvern	Sheds Together Herefordshire	Staff and volunteer costs, equipment and marketing.	£10,000.00	35
Ewyas Harold Craft Centre	Volunteer Family Support Service	Purchase of equipment to support centre activities	£999.00	250
Home-Start Herefordshire	Home-Start Family Support Service	Core funding to support family life (1:1) in Herefordshire.	£20,000.00	260
West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre	Herefordshire Counselling	Specialised counselling services for survivors of sexual violence in Herefordshire.	£8,538.00	10 families
@The Hub	Community Link Worker	Staff costs for community engagement	£20,000.00	300
Growing Local CIC	Family Cook and Growing Workshops	Family Cook Workshops at the Kindle Centre and Family Garden Workshops at The Southside Farm.	£9,403.00	600
Hereford Nurture through Nature CIC	Outdoor Playgroup	Nature-based, outdoor playgroup sessions in Leominster and Hereford	£1,760.00	60
Open Arms Kington (OAK) CIC	Community engagement & outreach	Community-focused events and activities in Kington.	£15,000.84	3000

Summary of the projects impact

Overall, the projects have made a marked difference to those involved by providing support to those in need and opportunities for meaningful activities, which fostered friendship and purpose. Volunteering played a key part in many of the projects and from the feedback received, it is clear that *'helping others, helps ourselves.'* Meaningful connections have been made between participating organisation and also for individuals. For some, this has been transformational.

Some people have had the chance to give back for the support they received or to help others, which has led to further activity and volunteering, such as Sunflower Socials set up by an individual who attended Places of Welcome at **Open Arms Kington (OAK) CIC**.

A Festival of Volunteering was held in September 2024 to celebrate the work of over 100 volunteers at Ross Good Neighbours scheme with **Ross Community Development Trust (Ross CDT)**. They support those most in need in the local community through a range of services, such as pet care, shopping, DIY and gardening and of course, befriending.

West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre provided specialised counselling to Herefordshire families, which has improved their health and wellbeing and enabled them to feel safer and stronger.

Families in Herefordshire and Leominster have benefitted from outdoor activities with **Growing Local CIC** and **Nurture through Nature CIC**. This has enabled them to connect to nature and form support networks.

The Community Link Worker **@The Hub** in Ross-on-Wye has been a fantastic support to individuals who are isolated and marginalised. The Warm Welcome on Wednesdays has provided them with a space to be and opportunities to connect with others.

Hope Support Services provided vital support to young people in Ross-on-Wye and Leominster whose families were affected by health crises, as well as much-needed respite through their family fun days. The Youth Management 'Y Team' has gained valuable skills through a variety of intergenerational activities.

At Shed's Together (**AGE UK Wyvern**) and at Brierley Court Community Garden (**Connexus Homes**), individuals have been able to share their expertise with others, leading to great satisfaction and a sense of wellbeing.

Through the commitment of volunteers at **Home-Start Hereford**, families supported have increased in confidence and resilience, enabling them to cope with life challenges and provide the best start in life for their children.

Engaging community events at **Hereford Community Farm** have linked families and individuals to a range of services to support their health and wellbeing. A range of volunteer opportunities have enriched lives.

The **Arts and Crafts Community Centre** at Ewyas Harold has created an artistic community, by expanding its exhibiting members and volunteers and providing facilities for families.



Family cooking activities

Hope Support Services

Hope Support Services supports children and young people aged 5-25 during a family health crisis, from the moment of diagnosis of a loved one with a serious illness, for as long as needed, whatever the prognosis.

Their project aimed to bring together families and volunteers across the county to create support networks as well as critical peer-to-peer support and community respite activities for children and young people, in addition to the one-to-one support which they already provide.

Hope Support Services were awarded £15,612 to employ a part-time youth worker. They supported a new youth group in Ross-on-Wye and existing groups in Leominster and Hereford. The funding also allowed them to develop and host two county-wide family days for all affected families across the county.

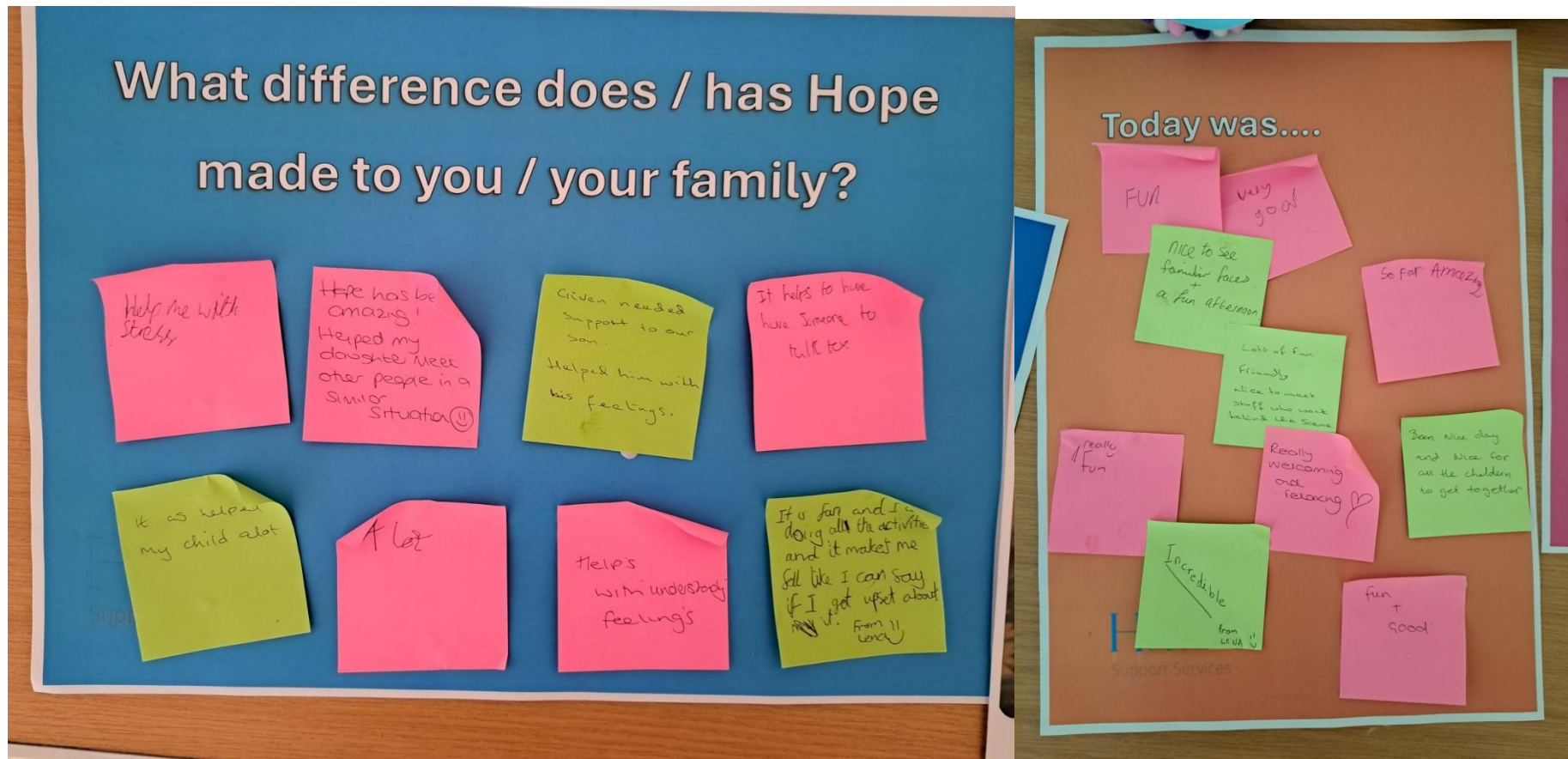
Priorities met:

The project aimed to meet all elements of priorities one and two, underpinning the **best start in life** for the young people affected and supported by Hope Support Services.

In late Spring 2024, a new youth group was established in partnership with Hay Community Garden in Ross. 26 youth sessions were held with a total of 150 attendances in the period. 10 young people were supported, most of whom are from John Kyre High School. They have formed a tight-knit group, which has benefited them when at school.

Hope Support Services held two Family Days. At their first ever event in Hereford at Saxon Hall, supported children and their families came together to play games and enjoy a meal. The second family day at Cotswold Wildlife Park was an opportunity for an 'awayday' for the children whom they support and their families.

At Cotswold Wildlife Park, families explored the park on their own or in groups. Everyone received vouchers for refreshments and all gathered together for a group lunch, providing an opportunity for families to exchange contact information, get to know each other, and share experiences. Transport was provided for families who might not otherwise have been able to do so due to the pressures of looking after an ill loved one at home or in hospice.



Feedback from families

Ross Youth Group Leader and Wellbeing adviser provided details of the impact to individuals of the Family Fun Days.

“Getting children and young people into groups with other children going through similar situations is very important to show them they are not alone and other people are also leaning on us for support. Asking for help can be really hard but seeing other people do it can encourage them.”

“A large amount of our children and young people are in a position where they have a parent who is unwell or has passed. This can lead to them not being able to go out with their families on weekends, or going on holidays. Our trips and Family Days allow the children to go on fun and rewarding day out. This gives the children and young people a break from a potentially stressful environment at home.”

“I have seen children and young people who were initially unable to talk about the loved one they lost, as it is too difficult to think about or they do not want to speak, that are now able to easily articulate their feelings about their loss and speak about memories with their loved one in a positive way.”

“Children and young people have begun actively asking questions about how to cope with certain aspects of their loss, e.g. the one-year anniversaries and birthdays. This demonstrates a want to recognise these tough days and work through them.”

“Children and young people have acknowledged the difficulty of the emotions associated with loss, but focussed on the positives of spending more time with family and leaning on friends for support.”

Stories of support provided to individuals

“We had a referral for three teenage girls - twins and an older sibling - whose dad is seriously ill with cancer. Due to dad's illness and mum's and the girls' caring responsibilities, they were heading into a summer with no trips away and very few days out or activities. The Hope Support Services Ross Youth Group sessions became one of the highlights of the summer, enabling the girls to escape the reality of home, where dad's illness is ever-present, and make some new friends who had similar experiences. Participating in activities such as cooking, gardening and spending time outdoors together provided distractions that enabled the girls to express their feelings in a safe space, without judgment.”

Through the sessions, they have learned that it is normal to experience pre-bereavement grief, as well as a lot of ups and downs of hope and disappointment by turns. They have also learned some different skills, including deep breathing, mindful visualisation, listening to music, getting outside and talking things out. She has engaged brilliantly in the sessions and made good use of these newly learnt coping strategies. They have shared with staff that they have learned how to communicate with others, and that reaching out for help is a positive thing.

Going back to school in the Autumn it was a boost for the girls to know there are several other girls at their school that they can reach out to if needed. The 9 girls at Ross group have become very close and the siblings were feeling confident enough by Halloween to join the Hope on the Road residential trip to Wales, of about 20 children, which was a big success and gave them an extended break from the stress of what is happening at home, as well as providing a break for mum.”

“K was referred to us by St Michael’s Hospice when her mum was unwell. She has continued with us since mum’s death. She had one-to-ones since then and has been attending one of our youth groups. She was very quiet and expressed feeling low at times and struggling to get up in the mornings.

She was quiet in our groups and did not go out of her way to socialise with the others there. Over the months, she has grown from strength to strength. She has become more confident within her 1-1’s, developing great social skills and sharing how she has been feeling.

In groups, she has developed friendships and openly chats with group leaders and her peers about the activity, or how her week has been. On trips and at residentials, she has challenged herself and overcome fears- most notably a fear of heights that she overcame on our most recent residential. Afterwards, she told us how proud of herself she was and continued challenging herself by doing more activities at a height. Moving forward, she will continue coming to group and on trips, but as she has come so far, her one-to-ones will now take place once a month rather than bi-weekly.”

Youth engagement

The youth management team, called the Y-TEAM, made up of young people aged 14 to 25 with lived experience of a family health crisis, were able to hold monthly sessions with Hope Support Service staff. The Y-TEAM helps to decide policies, makes recruitment decisions and helps to design and plan youth activity days and residential trips.

They do fundraisers and team-building events, and have been on work experience in the Hope Support Services office and they have purchased a barbecue with other funds they raised. They have planned their own residential trip and a visit to the Houses of Parliament to learn about social action.

The Y-Team's growing cohesion and interest in social action also look to the future in terms of advocacy and campaigning for the community we support. Two of the Young Wellbeing Advisers/Youth Workers now have experience of running Family Days and understand the dynamics of reaching out to and working with our supported families.



The Y Team

Community Partnership

Hope Support Services has developed excellent relationships with Haygrove Community Gardens, who run the Ross Community Garden and will expand the partnership to their Leominster location in the future.

Connexus Homes Ltd

Connexus Homes provides support to homeless young people, focusing on their well-being and the development of life skills. They support individuals aged 16-25 who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness due to family breakdowns, leaving care, or relocation for safety reasons. Many have experienced trauma and require guidance in accessing mental health services. Connexus Homes emphasises teaching essential life skills and facilitating the return to education, training, or employment for these young people.

Connexus Homes received £1000 award from Herefordshire Together to establish a community kitchen and garden initiative at Brierley Court Hereford. The focus was to support the young homeless people and to develop intergenerational work.

Priorities met

The project met the Priority One target to **increase connections through intergenerational activity** and Priority Two target to **increase number of children, who experience disadvantage to have community-based support**. The project supports the **best start in life** and **good mental health**.

Young people have been actively engaged in assembling the greenhouse and organising the gardening equipment and material for raised and lower beds. The funding also enabled the purchase of a barbecue.

Both the young people involved and the staff supporting them have learnt new skills in gardening and cooking. Some of the young people have taken leadership roles in both gardening and cooking activities and this has given them practical life skills and a sense of responsibility. The young people and older volunteers have benefitted from intergenerational support and have gained learning experiences in sustainable garden practices.

Best start in life

- Young people have been empowered by taking the lead in gardening and cooking activities, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership.
- The project has provided young participants with opportunities to develop practical life skills, enhancing their readiness for future challenges and promoting a strong foundation for their personal growth.

- Increased outdoor activities have been particularly beneficial, offering young people a healthy environment where they can unwind and reduce screen time, supporting their physical health and wellbeing.

Good Mental Health

- The project's emphasis on social inclusion has helped reduce social anxiety and boost confidence, particularly through the summer barbecue event that encouraged intergenerational connections.
- Learning new skills in a supportive setting has contributed to the mental wellbeing of both participants and staff, offering a sense of accomplishment and purpose.
- Meaningful discussions on sustainable practices have engaged participants in environmentally conscious thinking, promoting mental engagement and a sense of contribution to broader societal goals.
- The creation of a space where young people can take breaks and enjoy nature has supported their mental health, offering a restorative environment.

The project played a role in reducing inequalities by addressing the wider issues that affect health, including housing, employment, and crime. These are:

- * Support people to live and age well
- * Improve access to local services
- * Good work for everyone
- * Support those with complex vulnerabilities
- * Reduce our carbon footprint
- * Improve housing and homelessness

Connections were increased through intergenerational activity to strengthen community ties, improve life skills, and encourage physical and mental well-being, laying a strong foundation for continued positive impact.

Community Involvement and Bringing Generations Together

In summer 2024, a community barbecue was held for people of all ages, especially older members of the community. This event helped bring different generations together, reduced social anxiety, and encouraged young people to feel more confident. It showed how outdoor activities can help people connect and build a stronger community.



Brierley Court Garden

Voices from the Community

“Mrs. P, an older visitor, suggested adding herbs and spices to the garden. She also offered to join regular gardening sessions to share her knowledge with the young people. This kind of sharing helps build strong bonds across generations.”

“One young person, Mr. B, was unsure about gardening at first but became more interested after seeing the plants grow. He is excited to use chillies from the garden to teach others how to cook his favourite meals. This shows how the project helps young people gain new skills and confidence. The project also gave community members a chance to work together by planning what to plant in the garden for the coming year.”

Thanks to the funding, the outdoor area at Brierley Court Hub has seen significant improvement, with additions of a greenhouse and barbecue. Also purchased are raised garden beds, seeds, tools, soil, trellis, and grow tunnels, a non-slip patio floor, garden storage, and kitchen supplies like scales, cutlery, and cleaning items.

Extra items made the outdoor and kitchen areas more comfortable and welcoming, so young people have nice places to relax and enjoy after gardening. The Grow, Cook, Eat project supports young people’s mental health and wellbeing through gardening, cooking, and social activities.

“At the heart of the project and its legacy is an outdoor space where young people can feel safe, connect with nature, learn new skills, and make friends. These changes help us run many activities that build confidence and promote wellbeing for young people.”

Domonique Pugh, Younger Persons Service Manager – Connexus Homes

Ross-on-Wye Community Development Trust (Ross CDT)

Ross CDT exists to unlock the potential of the Ross-on-Wye community, working collaboratively and creatively to enhance the quality of life in the town. They aim to do this by: listening and consulting; networking and sharing information; supporting the voluntary sector and initiating projects to meet identified needs.

Funding from Herefordshire Together of £15,000 has enabled Ross CDT to continue its Ross Good Neighbours project, which connects vulnerable and isolated people with services such as befriending and shopping. The grant has also allowed the expansion of the Helpline across the South & West Primary Care Network (PCN).

Through both these activities they have addressed loneliness and social isolation and risk of frailty for vulnerable individuals by providing information sharing and signposting, thus contributing to good mental wellbeing in older age groups. Outputs include:

1. greater social contact for vulnerable people
2. volunteering opportunities
3. greater networking by community organisations with each other and with the community

Greater social contact for vulnerable people

The Ross Good Neighbours (RGN) scheme aims to help people across the town, Bridstow and Weston-under-Penyard in many different ways and is at the heart of Ross CDT operations. Volunteer teams have provided a range of services for people who are vulnerable and need support, including a home shopping service for those who are isolated, pet care, light DIY or gardening tasks. They also have a 24/7 messaging service, which is used as a dedicated Helpline. During the funding year, volunteers completed 283 shops for 13 customers.



Help with shopping – Ross Good Neighbours Scheme

Volunteering opportunities

Just over 100 volunteers were involved in the Ross Good Neighbours scheme, including 50+ newsletter/leaflet deliverers, 2 newsletter editorial, 7 Helpline, 12 shoppers, 3 payment volunteers, 17 befrienders, 3 DBS check team, plus 11 trustees/coordinators.

Ross CDT has run safeguarding training events for their volunteers and those of other groups. They have processed 85 volunteer DBS checks for 23 local organisations, thus enabling their efforts to recruit volunteers.

In September 2024, they ran a 'Festival of Volunteering' as part of the John Kyrle 300 celebrations. This was attended by over 100 volunteers from 26 local organisations. Attendees enjoyed music, a pop-up bar and photo booth, "I volunteer in Ross" badges and an opportunity to engage with each other to make new connections and celebrate old ones.

Networking with other charities and groups

Ross CDT has allowed the use of their Helpline as a virtual switchboard to other groups in the S&W PCN area. OWLS Good Neighbours accepted and they now act as a reception service for them, having set up a local number to access the Helpline.

74 local volunteer organisations are engaged and can send information about their activities, which Ross CDT advertise on their website, social media and 'Ross Neighbourhood News' (RNN). This newsletter is delivered by volunteers quarterly to 6500 local households. RNN shares good news stories, encourages volunteering and lists local volunteer vacancies.

Ross CDT is also a Talk Community Hub. Its helpline volunteers are trained to signpost callers to the help and information needed. In partnership with Taurus Healthcare Social Prescribing team, Ross CDT provides improved access to services in the local area.

Ross CDT is a Disclosure & Barring Service umbrella organisation and offers free DBS volunteer checks for their full member groups.

Ross Good Neighbours Scheme

During the funding year, Ross Good Neighbours worked to address the county's Health and Wellbeing Strategy's Priorities to **support people to live and age well** and **improve access to local services**.

1. Support people to live and age well

Shopping and befriending clients were surveyed to discover their experiences of our services. The responses showed good satisfaction across a range of indicators.

100% of respondents reported improvement in their physical or emotional health. Respondents specifically referred to help with tasks around the house, companionship, better eating due to shopping, getting out, having errands run, feeling of interdependency, support with mental health issues, increased vocabulary (client with dementia), taking knitting up again, and helping with memory/recall through repeat visits.

100% of respondents feel less isolated.

Respondents specifically referred to the value of regular visits, which they look forward to.

100% of respondents feel their overall wellbeing has improved through engagement and this also extends, in some cases, to their family members.

2. Improve access to local services

During the funding year, the Helpline received 673 calls from 154 individual numbers.

Ross CDT monitored the impact of Ross Neighbourhood News by running a survey at their regular stall at Ross Market. 100% of the respondents who received RNN each quarter said that they found it useful, with several commenting on the Helpline contact and the What's On pages.

Working closely with Taurus Healthcare Social Prescribing team, Ross CDT follow up their referrals and offer our services (shopping and befriending) or, in some cases, make an onward referral to other providers.

QUOTES beneficiaries of Ross Good Neighbour Scheme

'Ross Good Neighbours shopping team was an absolute lifeline when I needed it most and enabled me to retain my independence when it really mattered - I don't know what I would have done without them'

'My befriender knows me so well and I don't think I would venture out nearly so much if it wasn't for her encouragement and support when she visits me'

'My mother benefits emotionally but also physically as her befriender has been doing knitting which helps her dexterity but also the chatting helps to retain her vocabulary which for someone with dementia is so key'

*'We couldn't ask for a better person, J encourages V to engage and talks about the local area and history and V remembers her each time she visits'
'I honestly have no idea how I would cope without my shopper'*

*'Dad really looks forward to M's visits and it helps his recall as he tells me (daughter) about the visit the next day'
'I told H (befriender) she's the daughter I never had.'*



Supporting the community in Ross-on-Wye

Collaborations

The Herefordshire Together project has enabled Ross CDT to build stronger ties with other groups, both in Ross (such as @theHub) and further afield, through the workshops/meetings provided and the encouragement and advice available from Healthwatch Herefordshire.

Ross Town Council is highly supportive and has nominated a councillor to sit as a corporate representative on the CDT trustee board. Each month, this representative reports back to the Council.

Ross CDT is working with HVOSS to extend its DBS checks service to other VCSE groups in the County.

During the project Ross CDT developed close links with local Social Prescribers, who regularly make referrals to them (and sometimes Ross CDT makes referrals to the Social Prescribers where a client need arises that they are unable to meet).

Priorities met

The project has met the following priority one targets

- Reduce loneliness & isolation
- Increase connections through community activity
- Increase connections through intergenerational activity
- Increase peer support for emotional wellbeing

People supported

Client R, 55-year-old male, referred through Ross Larder for Warm Ross fuel voucher. Ross Good Neighbours (RGN) attended the client's house and paid £50 onto the gas account. The client advised that he was desperate to get back into work but was struggling as he needed bus fare, phone top-up and PPE. The volunteer with RGN spoke to @The Hub and took the client for a meeting. @theHub accessed PPE and provided his bus fare in order for the client to start work in Hereford as a labourer. The volunteer saw the client a short while later. He had completed his first week of employment and would be paid the next. So he will be self-sufficient moving forward.

Client A, an 85-year-old woman living with dementia. Referred via daughter for befriending and allocated Befriender B who lives around the corner, so can pop in regularly to check on her. The client comes from Wales, as does the befriender's wife. He brought old postcards around from the area, which prompted her memories.

Client G, an 86-year-old living with dementia in a sheltered housing development. Referred by daughter as having a busy week, but has a very short-term memory, so requested a befriender and allocated M. Daughter reported that M's visits have a huge impact and she is very careful to sit where G can see and talk to her easily. She has also brought knitting along (with her daughter's permission) and this has helped with her dexterity. The conversations have also helped with the retention of vocabulary.

Client S, a 93-year-old living independently with no family or carer, self-referred for general help sorting out the house, but due to ill health, shopping became the priority. The shopper has also involved another member of RGN to help source new strip lights for the reading room, which the client was desperate for.

Hereford Community Farm CIC

Since 2007, Hereford Community Farm has been embedded within the community, working in a collaborative approach with beneficiaries, families, VCSE organisations and statutory services to develop and deliver supportive land-based programmes at a grassroots level that address unmet need.

The award of £19,060 from Herefordshire Together has supported community engagement through the 'Routes of Connection' project to enable Hereford Community Farm to extend its work locally. The funding supports communities across Herefordshire with a focus on South Wye areas of Hinton, Hunderton, Redhill, Newton Farm and Grafton, The project supported **best start in life** and **good mental health**.

Funded activities

- Open Event (July 2024)
- Community Picnic (August 2024)
- Festive event (December 2024)
- 4 Family Days
- 20 x 1:1 Sessions

At the beginning of the project, Herefordshire Community Farm held an Open Event, featuring 11 exhibitors from statutory services and the VCSE sector. Individuals and families benefited from animal interactions, crafts, games and other activities around the stands. The event attracted 151 people and facilitated 272 conversations. Advice and signposting were the name of the day, including:

- 10 health checks were completed by Taurus Healthcare, with the majority stating they would not have arranged this themselves.
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire Rescue Service referred 6 households for a free fire check and
- Other referrals were made by Talk Community to their Healthy Lifestyles Team.

“Relaxed environment, which made people feel comfortable. The activities worked really well for engaging families and helped with engagement at the stand.” Talk Community/Healthy Lifestyles Team

The event was put together with help from members of the community, with one member supplying the entertainment. It facilitated social connections between neighbours, many of whom had not met before the event. Some connections have continued to develop outside of the farm environment.

There were further opportunities for organisations to connect with the community at the Family Days. These particularly welcomed SEND children and their families. Feedback from families identified a need for a trained person, offering advice and signposting. Herefordshire Community Farm invited Emma Kelly, Herefordshire Council’s SEND Engagement & Market Development Officer, to attend the family days. One of the Family Days was held at St Martin’s Foodshare to broaden our reach to families that had not previously engaged with Herefordshire Community Farm or those unable to travel to the farm due to barriers.



Routes of Connections event at Hereford Community Farm

"Attending the SEND Family Fun Day was an invaluable opportunity to meet with families in a relaxed setting and be available to answer any questions they had about what is available for children and young people with SEND in Herefordshire. I was able to have an informal chat with almost all the parent carers in attendance and signposted them to at least one other service following discussions about their needs as a family. It was easier to engage with the families in the farm setting as we struck up a conversation about the activities initially and then moved on to a discussion about SEND, led by them.

One of the parents commented that it was so nice to meet someone from the council in person, as it's easier to chat and it feels like you're talking to a real person, not just a name at the end of the phone/email. I would be very happy to attend again if you were to run another event so that I can continue to build relationships with the families that access your invaluable service."

Emma Kelly, SEND Development and Marketing Officer, Herefordshire Council

1:1 Sessions

The Community Engagement Officer provided 1:1 sessions for individuals and families. Examples of these are:

- Young people who find large groups anxiety-provoking
- Siblings of SEND children who find normal family outings uncomfortable or 'embarrassing.'
- A young NEET person who came to us via the Youth Employment Hub. Having dropped out of college, they had lost their confidence but were interested in working in a farm environment. We spent time discussing their interests and potential options alongside a YEH staff member.
- A young person who came to us via Bright Beginnings, who was NEET and living away from family.
- A young person with severe learning difficulties who would have found a normal family day overwhelming and too fast-paced.

The Festive Event, in December, allowed the local Grafton community to celebrate the year's achievements and to thank those who had helped on the farm. Local company Gamber donated a free Christmas Tree and volunteer Suzanne created decorations with her local visually impaired craft group.

Routes of Connection met priorities one and two by [creating lasting, meaningful connections for people](#) and [improving emotional wellbeing and sense of community](#) and [strengthening the reach to families in need](#).

Through a range of different events, Hereford Community Farm has brought the Grafton community together to facilitate social connections and improve community cohesion. Residents have driven the community-led approach, giving back through volunteering, sharing skills/ lived

experience and support to others at Family Days or by donating items such as furniture, toys and decorations to the farm. This has reduced loneliness and isolation and increased the sense of belonging, with connections between residents lasting, as they have continued beyond the end of the project and into others and outside of the farm environment.

Many families who had a 1:1 session find regular outings difficult and stressful as they feel they are being judged. Having a positive experience together, enhanced their emotional and mental wellbeing and encouraged them to attend Family Days.



Feeding the goats at Hereford Community Farm

Best start in Life

Increased engagement with families in a fun, engaging, non-judgmental environment, particularly those with SEND and those in HR2, HR1 and HR4 who may be experiencing health inequalities.

Good Mental Wellbeing throughout life

The project has reached parts of the community with no previous knowledge of Herefordshire Community Farm and increased engagement with individuals and families of all ages, particularly those in HR2, HR1 and HR4.

"A fantastic community project where everyone's contribution will be valued. It brings people together to work, to achieve social inclusion, and overall wellbeing."

Dave and Ali (local residents).

Collaborations

The project connected HCF with the Senior Youth Worker at Wye Valley Trust, who works with young people who have missed large parts of schooling and the short-stay Hospital and Outreach Education service. They also connected with home-schooled children, many of whom have SEND or anxiety issues.

The project has been promoted to organisations such as Phoenix Bereavement, Herefordshire Young and Young Adult Carers, and SENDIASS and the Herefordshire SEND Local Offer Facebook page and newsletter have been particularly supportive in promoting the project's events with their followers.

This engagement work identified Community Acorns (trusted community figures/places), including Cllr Kevin Tillet, Cllr Cat Hornsey (St Martin's Foodshare) Pastor David Bland (Foodshare), Lyndsey Evans (Belmont Community Centre), Vince McNally (Hinton Community Centre), Katey Lyons (Grafton resident) and Malcolm Taylor (Veterans Art Group). These have been instrumental in helping Herefordshire Community Farm learn about the area and its challenges and provide information about local support groups. They have promoted events and the support continues beyond the life of the project.

Community Acorns and the Community Engagement Officer conducted significant engagement work at regular intervals throughout the project at St Martin's Foodshare, Belmont Community Centre, Newton Community Hub, Hinton Community Centre and the Kindle Centre.

Connections that have developed through the project with statutory services and VCSEs will remain valuable as Herefordshire Community Farms continues to work collaboratively, potentially offering them a space to conduct outreach work.



Children feeding small animals

An individual's story of connection

Katey is a carer for her elderly father, who has Alzheimer's. Katey was socially isolated and unable to work. Through attending HTP events, Katey has benefitted by connecting with neighbours in her local community and by running a craft activity under HTP. This has springboarded her into running craft sessions for HCF under another project. Positive impacts for Katey have been reduced social isolation, supporting family life and caring responsibilities, building skills and improving access to employment (as Katey has been paid by the farm for her craft sessions) and rural issues. Both Katey and her father have benefited from access to other organisations such as Taurus Healthcare and Dementia Matters) when attending HTP events.

"I've lived in Grafton since 2000. Appreciating nature as I do, I was aware of the house martins, sparrows and masonry bees who inhabit various parts of the old barn adjacent to the lane. I talked to a lady doing an ecological survey of the barn about 2 years ago and became aware of the possibility of a community farm coming to the site. I went to the first meetings with Julie and John at the Grafton Inn and followed the progress of the project when informative displays and events were arranged at the farm.

I currently work with disabled adults doing craft classes and look after my father, who has Alzheimer's. I've been especially pleased that there will be provision of dementia friendly events which my dad and I can attend. Through attending events, I've become involved with the farm by taking craft classes, some of which have been at the Hinton Community Centre."

Katey in her own words

Age UK Wyvern

Age UK aims to support older people in the community by preventing or relieving poverty, sickness or suffering; advancing education and promoting equality and diversity and the human rights of older people. They do this by assisting older people in need of support through health and social exhaustion, or other disadvantages.

Funding from Herefordshire Together of £19,602 has allowed Age UK Wyvern to develop its pop-up Sheds Together project in new locations – Leominster, Kington, Ledbury and Bromyard. The project supports **good mental health**. The Sheds encourage people to come together to make,

repair and repurpose, supporting projects in their local communities and offering a safe, welcoming environment for men (and women) to come together and learn and share new skills in four locations across the county.

Priorities met

Sheds Together meets the priority one target to **reduce loneliness and isolation**.

The grant covered staff volunteer costs, equipment and marketing. The project has given older men who are often overlooked as a group with specific needs, the opportunity to meet in a safe, welcoming environment to discuss the things that are important to them and to work together on projects to learn/share skills and build local social/support networks.

Age UK Wyvern knows that older men who are living alone following bereavement or being the main carer in the home and struggling with the increase in the cost of living and with day-to-day life often feel embarrassed or too proud to ask for help. This project was a way to engage with them without fear of stigma or judgement.

It brought communities together, fostering mutual support at multiple levels, whether through volunteering or active participation. Individuals with newly acquired skills have enabled previously excluded participants to engage in activities.

The Sheds Together project aims to recruit volunteers local to each shed location to develop local support networks, benefiting those living in rural areas who struggle with access to services and support.

This holistic approach has enabled Age UK Wyvern to target support where it is needed and ensure the best outcomes for each service user.



Shedders with bird boxes and hedgehog homes

Health and wellbeing

The Sheds Together project supported the goals of the Herefordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy by providing a safe, welcoming space for people aged 50 and over to connect, share conversations, and create together—enhancing wellbeing, reducing loneliness, and tackling social isolation

Supporting people to live and age

People over the age of 50 come together through connection, conversation and creation, whilst improving wellbeing, reducing loneliness and combating social isolation. Each member of the Shed receives an induction to the group, a workstation, the opportunity to learn new skills and receive training.

Improve access to local services

Volunteers and staff supporting the Sheds were able to signpost people to local organisations and Age UK services. They have helped with benefit checks, accessing support, dementia information, digital inclusion and bringing people together to join more groups in their local communities.

Each member of the Sheds has been able to access information and training whilst developing new skills with their peers. More senior members of the Shed often mentored those who showed a wish to learn a new skill or who needed more support than others.

Across the Shed locations, AGE UK Wyvern has been supporting individuals who are living with dementia to enable them to enjoy the same benefits as other members and to feel more part of their communities by forging new friendships.

People who access the Sheds want to be a part of the projects for many of the same reasons. They want to feel more connected to their communities and make new friends. Staff and volunteers have seen an increase in their confidence and shedders have felt generally better in their wellbeing.

Age UK Wyvern staff and volunteers at Sheds Together have actively supported those members who have let them know if they are struggling with their mental health. They have been able to work with them in a way that enabled that member to enjoy their experience with us whilst building trust in the organisation and project.



Workshop activities with 'Sheds Together'

Outputs included:

- Shed sessions
- Inductions
- Training courses
- Newsletters

Benefits included:

- Improved mental wellbeing of Shedders
- Increased self-confidence of Shedders
- New skills gained for Shedders or project volunteers
- Shedders gaining employment as a result of learning new skills in the Shed

Shed Projects

Sheds make significant contributions to projects within their local communities and have over the last year:

- Repaired and refurbished a Lectern, used in the Cemetery Chapel, for Ledbury Town Council
- Design and make a saluting dais for LTC
- Made bird, owl and bat boxes for various wildlife projects
- Design, make and fit boxes to enclose TV sets sited on the patio at the LRFC
- Design and make boot scrapers for the LRFC players
- Design and make fixtures for the Age UK Wyvern retail units
- Repair and refurbish toys for the Nursery at the Hope Centre
- Make hedgehog habitats for LTC. Part of a prize in an LTC Children's colouring competition#
- Boot pullers
- Tool caddies
- Key holders
- Convert donated plates into Cake Stands for sale in the Age UK shops
- Design and make cold frames for the Age UK Wyvern Allotment in Pershore
- Make scenery for the Bromyard Theatre Pantomime production

At present, there are 35 participants shared between both 'Make n Mend' Shed locations. Not all attend every session, but there is a core of 15 who do. There are five staff volunteers.



Cold frames and bench produced at 'Sheds Together'

Future Sheds

Make n Mend Sheds focus on woodwork. However, Sheds are now attracting more people, including women who would like to work on other crafts. Age UK Wyvern are now looking into opening extra days around the woodwork days to accommodate Glasswork sessions and for the venue to be used flexibly for this. They hope to see an added increase in participants using the sheds and that they are able to adapt to multi-functional uses.

Shedders story

“My name is Laszlo and I have been diagnosed with Borderline Personality disorder and CPTSD. I find Men's Shed a very good place to spend time in where I can do woodcarving art. It helps me to unwind and relax. It's also a good opportunity for me to socialise and escape loneliness. David, the workshop leader, is a very approachable and friendly person, just like the service users. Even if I feel depressed or have anxiety, they are very empathetic and supportive. Since I'm visiting Man's shed, my mental and physical health have improved, just as my social circle. I feel less social anxiety and have started feeling comfortable around strangers. It's like a safe haven in darker days. I would like to say thank you very much for everyone who is involved in running the Man's Shed!!!”

Ewyas Harold Craft Centre

The craft centre at Ewyas Harold sits at the southern base of the Golden Valley. It aims to provide a social space with a wide range of arts and crafts opportunities for the local community and an exhibition space and a business outlet for artists and creative people in the locality and the wider Herefordshire area. The craft community started four years ago and offered a weekly meeting space with a craft focus.

The Ewyas Harold Craft Centre opened in March 2024, offering a cafe, gallery, resource library and quiet space. It opens five days a week as a gallery and coffee shop; holds regular craft groups, now three in number, up from one and including one exclusively for men. Follow-on and weekly courses are now being built for the most popular crafts. The Centre is staffed entirely by volunteers working in pairs.

The award from Herefordshire Together of £990, enabled them to buy equipment for their Volunteer Support Service. The project created [lasting, meaningful connections](#) for people to [improve their emotional wellbeing and sense of community](#). As the centre continues to grow its number of exhibiting members and art and craft workshop attendees, they have received great feedback from the community.

"A lovely craft centre. I wish every village had one!"
"Wonderful centre of creativity - so much to love..."
"A fantastic display of skilled craftsmanship."



Products from sewing courses at Ewyas Harold Craft Centre

Activities

- 3 free exhibitions for the local community, with items lent by members and the local community (quilts, wedding dresses and now handmade Christmas decorations)
- Holiday activity days for school-age children.
- Special events for visitors, residents of the local Care Home and also the local Choir.
- Increased the number of exhibiting members, many of whom also run affordably priced courses, which are extremely well attended.
- Participated in H.Art in 2024, which significantly increased sales and the awareness of the centre. The centre will be part of the Black Hills Arts and Crafts festival in 2025, the Ewyas Harold Scarecrow festival and H.Art in 2025.

The purchase of equipment and skills training for volunteers has contributed to the project meeting the county health and wellbeing strategy outcomes [Best start in life \(0-5 year olds\)](#) and [Good mental wellbeing throughout life](#).

- Volunteers qualified with level 1 food hygiene.
- The equipment purchased enabled the centre to welcome the youngest members of the community (highchairs, baby changer).
- Protective aprons and a stock of metalworking tools purchased have been used in several courses. Silver jewellery making is one of the most popular courses on offer.
- The purchase of two sewing machines has enabled the centre to offer sewing courses, offer sewing to those without a machine and tuition to those who own a machine, *“but are terrified of it”*. This has widened participation and provided opportunities for collaboration and companionship. All of which has helped reduce isolation in the cohort.

Good mental wellbeing throughout life

The centre contributes to a healthy, vibrant community and a supportive atmosphere, which is good for well-being and mental health, especially in rural communities scattered amongst the hills and valleys of southern Herefordshire.

The centre offers opportunities for a browse, coffee, chat or a more formal course. Almost all of the exhibitors have sold well, enhancing their self-esteem, artisan business and financial return, indeed in one case enabling one member to take up a new hobby and now produce goods for sale.

It has provided a meeting and social space to help reduce loneliness and isolation in this rural community, with many regular attendees. Volunteers have been aware of residents living on their own, those who experienced flooding, or those who have been in hospital. Even if no physical help was provided, the centre's members welcomed them when they could return to craft meetings, were aware of their situation and gave friendly support or called if someone had not been seen for a while.



Interior of Arts and Community Centre

Growing confidence and wellbeing

One lady who lives alone started to attend regular craft sessions, undertaking crystal pictures. Since attending a sewing course, she has started to work every day at the centre, making and selling tote bags. She now acts as a volunteer and takes on responsibility for the functioning of the centre.

She is earning more money, is engaged and out of her home five days a week. This has reduced her isolation and grown her confidence. Her work is amongst the most purchased and most complimented at the centre.

Working together

“Through the meetings for grantees, we met staff from Connexus Homes in Hereford. They donated about 20 boxes of unwanted craft materials. With their permission, we were able to sell those items we could not use. This has raised £550 for the centre and we are very grateful to them. We now have an extensive collection of craft papers, too and a good amount was also donated to the local primary school for their art lessons and after-school clubs.”

Arts & Crafts Community Centre

Home-Start Herefordshire

Home-Start Herefordshire is an independent charitable organisation that offers a countywide befriending service, whereby an experienced and highly trained volunteer is matched with a struggling family to provide both emotional and practical support that is tailored to their specific needs. The work is preventative, with Home-Start volunteers providing weekly one-to-one support to families in their own home, to prevent emerging problems from developing into crises which could lead to family breakdown or child neglect and abuse. The most disadvantaged and ‘hardest to help’ families are supported at the heart of where the challenge exists in a confidential and non-judgemental way, and at a pace that matches the parents’ and children’s capabilities.

An award from Herefordshire Together Fund of £20,000 was made to core-fund this organisation's work and sustain the essential volunteer family support service for vulnerable families with children 0-18 years living in Herefordshire. The service has **strengthened its reach to families in need** and created **lasting and meaningful relationships**, which **improved the emotional wellbeing** of families supported.

Many parents referred to Home-Start Herefordshire volunteer family support service were struggling with poor mental wellbeing, isolation, socio-economic difficulties, domestic abuse or physical and mental health challenges; all of which were having a negative impact on their children's lives. By working collaboratively over the last 12 months, Home-Start Herefordshire has helped 73 families (over 260 beneficiaries, 130 adults, 137 children, which included 70 under five years of age, 67 over five years).

- 70% were adversely affected by mental health challenges.
- 41% were adversely impacted by domestic abuse and violence.
- 38% families were struggling due to SEND (Special Education Needs and disabilities, including neurodiversity).
- 38% were lone parents.
- 4% were impacted by substance use.

This support has helped increase families' confidence, resilience and ability to cope with life challenges, helping them feel empowered to reach their individual goals and achieve sustainable positive outcomes for both parents and children. Parents reported **reduced isolation and loneliness**, **increased confidence and emotional wellbeing**, and **improved family relationships**.

“My volunteer is so kind and caring, she makes me feel ok, she listens to me and helps me to tackle my problems together. The children also love her visits.” (parent struggling with poor mental health)

Reaching families in need

Many of the children and young people referred to Home-Start face significant behavioural and emotional challenges that disrupt their daily lives and a large number also cope with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental and physical health issues, making them particularly vulnerable to loneliness, social isolation, and difficulties accessing local services.

The challenges they face, such as cost of living and housing shortages, perpetuate this disadvantage and often take a toll on their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, as they feel excluded from their communities. This exclusion reinforces their negative self-perceptions and deepens the impact

of their disadvantages. Many also struggle with school refusal, antisocial behaviour, and conduct problems, both at home and in their communities. These issues can lead to poor school attendance and performance, reducing their future opportunities. They may also face increased segregation within their communities, a higher risk of contact with the youth justice system and strained family and social relationships.

The rural nature of Herefordshire adds another layer of difficulty. Limited and often unreliable transport infrastructure makes accessing essential services and opportunities to connect with peers challenging for many young people. This isolation exacerbates their emotional and behavioural struggles, further lowering their self-confidence, self-respect, and belief in their own worth. It can also increase the likelihood of them engaging in negative behaviours, perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage, isolation, and stigma.

Volunteer Recruitment and Training:

Despite the national challenges in volunteer recruitment, Home-Start Herefordshire has adapted by introducing new and innovative ways to attract potential volunteers and reduce barriers to access training, including a recently trialled series of online training courses. They have offered an intensive short course during the summer holidays and face-to-face evening sessions. This has helped extend their reach by ensuring they can provide more inclusive opportunities for volunteer engagement and also reflects the needs of families requesting evening, after-school and holiday support.

Strengthening Family Relationships

Volunteers have played a vital role in strengthening fragile relationships between parents and children by ensuring the child's voice is heard, fostering active listening, and encouraging positive adult-child interactions to prevent family breakdown, explore solutions and spend quality time together. Volunteers committed 2–3 hours weekly to their matched family, working within a needs-led model, where they helped families identify together meaningful and achievable steps toward positive change. They created individualised support plans focused on building confidence, emotional resilience, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

“I would say that the reason I volunteer is that when I was a young mum and struggling to cope, I remember the support, reassurance and kindness I was shown by other mothers. Young mums now seem more isolated than ever before. If I can help any mum feel a bit better about her life, and pass on some of what I have learned, then that's great. Volunteering with Home-Start is an entirely positive experience. I feel very supported by the Home-Start staff and would encourage anyone considering it to join up.” (Feedback from volunteer)



Young mum and baby

School Readiness

Volunteers have a vast experience in school-related challenges, including supporting families and children with school attendance, attainment, behavioural challenges and school exclusion. Their support has helped children to improve academic performance, foster a sense of achievement, and cultivate a more positive attitude toward school and education.

Through the 'Big Hopes, Big Futures' School Readiness Project, families gained access to early intervention support, so that their children can enter educational settings ready to learn and families are better able to manage the sometimes difficult transition to nursery or school. The volunteer-led support model worked collaboratively with families in their own homes to develop parent engagement and awareness of the home environment as

the context for children's early learning and the influence this can have on children's readiness for school or nursery. By building their understanding of how to prepare their child for education settings, parents adapted their home routines and behaviours, enabling them to nurture and respond to their children in ways that supported a smooth transition.

Over the last 12 months, the project was piloted for those living in targeted areas of the county (Hereford City, Ross, Golden Valley and Leominster). It has linked up with local primary schools and their feeder nurseries to support children and families who are struggling with settling into school, helping with attainment and attendance, as well as preventing the escalation of need.

"Our volunteer helped me with strategies around routines, including help with bedtimes and eating. She helped with cooking, supporting me at meetings, and making sense of what was being said." (parent helped through school readiness project).

Working Collaboratively

Many families were in a time of crisis, making it incredibly difficult for them to access the specialist local services they required. With the support of its volunteers, Home-Start Herefordshire has delivered an effective, multi-agency, family-centred approach—connecting families to the additional help they need through national agencies, health services, and voluntary organisations

"Our volunteer related well as she had a real in-depth understanding of my daughter's additional needs. The support gave my daughter confidence and helped her feel more able to access other services and activities." (parent of child with SEND)

Building Community Connections

65 community-led volunteers provided needs-led, individualised support to families in their homes and communities. By addressing context-specific challenges faced within local communities, they have helped build strong connections and ensure that parents, children and young people felt heard, empowered and supported; fostering meaningful and lasting changes in their lives.

"The volunteer was very helpful to our family; we are very grateful." (13-year-old girl struggling with poor mental health).

"We went out on adventures 'bug hunting!' she did lots of silly fun things and liked running around with me and reading me stories." (7-year-old, family fled domestic abuse).

Stories of change

An 8-year-old boy was experiencing challenges with family relationships due to his special education needs and neurodiversity. The volunteer helped the boy to better understand and communicate his needs to his family and supported the parents to make changes to better support their son. This included making quiet spaces within the house for when he was feeling overwhelmed and providing techniques to try to help reduce his anxiety. By being able to better self-regulate his emotions and his parents appropriately responding to his needs, the family relationship significantly improved.

A 7-year-old girl was struggling with attainment and engagement at school because of her mum's poor mental health, which was impacting home routines (bedtime and completing homework). The volunteer supported the parent and child to develop a better bedtime routine so the girl could get enough sleep to engage well in lessons. The parent was also encouraged to engage more with her child's learning, which helped her child to be more open about school-related struggles. This meant that the parent was able to help her child engage better with school activities and tasks, such as homework and reading. As a result of Home-Start support, the girl's engagement in school improved and her parent were able to sustain the beneficial changes at home.

A 6-year-old child was struggling emotionally due to a recent parental split. The volunteer supported the girl to explore her emotions and feelings through age-appropriate activities such as books, games and writing exercises; the volunteer encouraged the whole family to be involved, which provided space and opportunities to talk together. With the support of the volunteer, the child was better able to voice her thoughts and feelings, and her family were able to listen to and offer containment for her anxieties.

“Core funding received from Herefordshire Together Fund has enabled us to not only sustain our current service delivery, but has also ensured we move into 2025/26 in a stronger position, whereby we are able to continue to contribute to the preventative family support offer for Herefordshire families.” **Home-Start Herefordshire**

West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (WMRSASC)

The grant of £20,000 awarded to WMRSASC has been crucial in enabling them to deliver specialised counselling services for survivors of sexual violence in Herefordshire and has had a fundamental impact, providing 10 clients, both children and adults alike, with specialist counselling.

- 24 sessions of specialised counselling were provided for these 10 clients, delivered by fully trained counsellors.

Weekly sessions were either face-to-face, online, or by telephone, tailored to their individual needs. Offering various session formats ensures no barriers hinder their weekly attendance and addresses issues such as travel difficulties, anxiety about leaving home, communication challenges, learning or physical disabilities and other specific needs. Without this funding, clients who benefitted from the counselling would have faced extended waiting periods.

The feedback from these clients has been overwhelmingly positive, describing the counselling received as a '*lifeline*' and '*life-changing*'. Many have successfully returned to work or resumed higher education studies, while others have experienced improved relationships and regained the ability to move forward after years of trauma that had previously hindered their lives. They expressed profound gratitude for the service made possible through the funding.

All 10 clients reported measurable improvements across the following areas:

- Improved health and wellbeing: 100% (10 clients) experienced improvement
- Better able to cope with aspects of life: 100% (10 clients) saw progress
- Increased feelings of safety: 100% (10 clients) felt safer
- Better informed and empowered to act: 100% (10 clients) felt more empowered

The funding has enabled WMRSASC to foster **lasting, meaningful connections that enhance emotional wellbeing, strengthen community bonds, and extend support to families in need**

Improved emotional wellbeing

WMRSASC provides a community-based approach that ensures that staff and volunteers have an in-depth understanding of local challenges and resources and can offer professional, confidential support to individuals experiencing distress. By doing so, they enhance emotional resilience and promote overall mental health within the community.

“Clients who benefited from these funded sessions were able to 'finally live life free from my past trauma' according to one client - this client was able to return to work following a period of being unable to attend work due to their mental health struggles as a result of the sexual violence they experienced. This return to work enabled them to feel less lonely and build connections with colleagues where previously fear and absence had held them back.

Other clients reported being able to return to hobbies they had previously given up on - one client returned to an evening community football practice that he had previously left, as his mental health struggles made it too hard for him to engage with people. During the counselling, he returned to this and saw his mental and physical health vastly improve and found he was able to make friends and connect with people with much less mistrust and fear than he previously had.”

WMRSASC Counsellor Feedback

Reaching families in need

By reducing barriers that prevent clients from accessing the service and providing choices for accessing therapy sessions online, face-to-face or by telephone, WMRSASC have supported clients who have difficulties with transport costs or access. Sessions are available between 8am and 8pm and this ensures that clients who work can access therapy after work hours. Therapy sessions for clients in schools and education settings have reduced the pressure on parents missing work to bring the child or young person to the centre and minimised the impact on missing school. A crisis fund is available for those who are eligible. The following quote is from a client WMRSASC supported, who had been struggling and ‘stuck’ out of work with a young family:

“From September I’ll be studying for my Master’s degree in Psychology part time around my job – who have agreed to let me have time during the working week to do some of the work as it will benefit the school, hopefully moving on towards a PhD in Educational Psychology longer term. Once again, I can’t thank you enough for the words of wisdom and space to listen you provided. I hope you realise the positive impact your work has on the people who are lucky enough to work with you guys.”

Enhancing Community Engagement and Reducing Isolation

WMRSASC counselling services have enhanced community engagement and reduce isolation in Herefordshire. Through accessible options such as in-person, online, and telephone sessions, they address social isolation, an issue affecting approximately 1 in 20 residents, as noted in the county Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This approach has helped individuals to overcome barriers posed by poor transportation links across the county and has widened access for remote communities in Herefordshire. By fostering stronger community connections and supporting individuals in building relationships, WMRSASC contributes to a more connected and supportive environment.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

By offering early support, WMRSASC aims to prevent the escalation of mental health issues and reduce the necessity for more intensive interventions later on. This proactive approach reflects an ongoing commitment to enhancing mental wellbeing throughout Herefordshire, guided by the organisation's deep understanding of local challenges and resources.

Story of change

This client received 24 sessions of counselling. When starting the therapy, he was on the verge of going off sick from work due to the constant triggers he would experience that brought his trauma to the forefront of his mind after years of trying to bury it. He was struggling in his relationship with his partner and was feeling suicidal. During his therapy, he was able to stay at work, saw his mental health vastly improve, was able to communicate about his trauma to his wife, which helped with understanding and support in their relationship and is even going on to train as a counsellor himself now.

"The support that I was given has been life-changing for me. It's taken most of my life to get to the point of being ready to be able to open up and be able to talk about my experiences and the impact they have had on me. I felt validated. I was treated in a way that allowed me to grow and see myself in different ways. My life feels like it's now moving forward after over 25 years of being stuck in a constant state of fear and very negative mental health. It was the hardest work of my life, but I was given the tools to do it. WMRSASC helped me change my life; it's something that will stay in my thoughts forever. Eternally thankful."

@The Hub, Ross-on-Wye

The idea behind the project began when Milly Boylan was working for hvoss as a support worker. She had nowhere quiet to meet people to discuss their needs, and to give them the support they needed to live their lives. She was often to be found in coffee shops, which was not conducive to private conversations. @The Hub was created to fill a gap for small support groups that couldn't afford their own space.

@The Hub is for anyone from all walks of life. The purpose is to build a stronger community presence within Ross-on-Wye, facilitating and enabling people to get help, to help themselves and to live and *'thrive in our town.'* Everyone is welcome!

Through the award from Herefordshire Together Fund of £20,000 @The Hub has been able to pay their support worker an income for 8 months. This allowed her to actively support nearly 100 people and to offer general support to approximately another 50.



Regular catch up over a game of pool

Building a sense of community

@The Hub has now been open for a year and two months and is open five days a week. In the eight months of the project @The Hub had 395 visits per month, which equates to 18 visits per day.

Clients can be lonely, socially isolated, discriminated against, in fuel poverty, in debt, hungry, in need of a shower and laundry facilities, needing help with benefits, housing, substance misuse or with their mental health. Some are parents who need support for their children with a variety of issues or special needs or with parenting skills.

On Wednesdays, @The Hub hosts a session called 'Warm Welcome', where they offer breakfast and lunch. Each week, 40 people attend who would otherwise be disenfranchised from the local community. These people commonly have nowhere else to be, and no one else to talk to. They are gradually developing a sense of trust between themselves and new friendships are forming and progressing outside of @The Hub.

Clients who have attended @The Hub have seen better emotional wellbeing, even in those suffering long-term anxiety and depression. @The Hub has observed this through informal conversations, use of questionnaires at the start and after a few months, feedback videos taken and clients bringing other people. Even those with long-term anxiety and depression have experienced better emotional wellbeing since coming to @The Hub.

Some clients are no longer coming regularly, as they have made and kept their support networks from visits to @The Hub and with support from staff and volunteers, resolved issues and barriers to their wellbeing.. Some clients are now volunteering @The Hub regularly to help and support others.

Support for families in need

Several families with children visit @The Hub regularly, some weekly and some daily. Some come for lunch on Wednesdays and some bring home-schooled children to engage with other people and develop a social circle. This has provided the [best start in life \(0-5\)](#).

Parents use the friendly, informal environment to talk to staff and volunteers about parenting challenges and children's behaviour, and many have said they feel more confident as parents as a result of the peer support offered.

A group of troubled teens, who have been excluded from every other provider of youth activities in Ross, regularly come in on Saturdays. They come to @The Hub for food and for meaningful conversations with adults who listen, empathise and support them. They value and enjoy their time and as a result of this, @The Hub are looking to extend this to after-school sessions. @The Hub also engages with the parents of these children and helped them to develop healthy parenting routines and behaviours to combat negative childhood experiences.

Other support provided includes:

- Benefit and debt advice, signposting to debt help providers, issuing vouchers for the foodbank, and for heating/electricity help.
- Pushed through the rehousing of a family with young children who were in sub-standard accommodation with mould growing on the walls of bedrooms and sitting rooms, adversely affecting the health of all living there.
- Numerous successful applications to the Housing Support Fund for clients, for items including rugs, a laptop for a home-schooled child, a washing machine, and a mattress for a Mum recovering from a serious operation.
- Mentoring for Mums and Dads, with opportunities to develop cooking skills and a safe play space for under 5s.
- Referrals to the MASH team for safeguarding concerns.
- Support for a young Mum to engage with her landlord for the return of a large housing deposit.

The project has [create lasting meaningful connections for people to improve emotional wellbeing and sense of community](#) through peer support and reducing isolation for individuals and families.



Fresh haircut, shower and change of clothes

"M is a stay-at-home Mum with a toddler. Her partner struggles with money, they are in debt and there are relationship issues. He brings in the only source of income to the family. M has no spare cash for groups or classes with the little one. She knows no other mums with small children locally. The situation is causing her a lot of stress, and affecting her health, her sleep and her ability to make decisions. She has limited family support, her Mum works and her sister is not local. When asked if she felt able to tackle life's challenges and plan for the future, she said, "Only as long as my partner listens to me. It is hard not being able to rely on him and to have no financial security. Of her visits to the Hub, she said, "I like having the company, and I like having someone I can speak to and share my feelings. It's just a lovely safe space."

We have enabled M to have a shower without feeling rushed, as she can use our bathroom and we can entertain the little one while she does this.

We have helped with relationship advice, parenting advice, and helped in a very tricky situation with her landlord unfairly withholding a housing deposit. We were able to accompany her to meetings, allay her severe anxiety by representing her on the phone and in person with the landlord, and successfully challenged the landlord's claims of damage to the property.

She now has a social circle, is less anxious and has better mental health as a direct result of her visits here. She has since moved to Hereford, but comes back on the bus once a week to visit us on a Wednesday."

@The Hub

Good Mental Wellbeing

@The Hub provides support to people who are unable to access statutory mental health or other voluntary sector provision. They can triage into the local alcohol and drug advisory service and accompany people to appointments when needed. Substance misuse is closely linked to mental ill-health, and getting started on the right track with Turning Point helps towards improving mental wellbeing. They can also accompany clients to the foodbank and other agencies if necessary, when their levels of mental ill-health and anxiety mean that they are unable to go alone.

Being able to pay a support worker for 30 hours a week @The Hub, has made a huge difference in the levels of support they have been able to offer. They are increasingly recognised in Ross as the place to refer people to who can't engage elsewhere (including GPs and social prescribers). They now have 60 active clients and have taken on another support worker to help with the caseload. They use tools such as radar charts, feedback forms, short videos and questionnaires to assess progress and development in people's emotional wellbeing.

Following a successful start, @The Hub has managed to secure funding for future work with The Iron Fund (HCF), E F Bulmer, S4IL, National Lottery Awards for All, and Platform Housing Special Project.



Thank you from regulars of @The Hub, Ross-on-Wye

Growing Local CIC

Growing Local was established in 2009 to connect the local community with their food and enable people to take control of the food they eat. Their educational programme inspires children, young people, families and adults to grow their own fruit and vegetables and to cook healthy budget-friendly meals.

In Summer 2023, the organisation began the development of their new 19-acre site on the southern edge of Hereford. The Growing Local Gardens project will establish a community market garden, a children's educational garden, orchards and picnic areas - a new destination for the people of South Wye and Hereford.

Growing Local Gardens are located adjacent to Newton Farm, the county's most deprived ward, and are part of the Southside Project, a collaborative initiative between Growing Local, Belmont Wanderers FC and NMITE. The three organisations work together to connect sport, food and education and to transform the inequality of deprivation and opportunity between the north and south of the city. The Southside Project collectively aims to empower the local community to improve health, employment aspirations, earnings potential, social mobility and life chances.

The award of £9,403 from Herefordshire Together Fund has enabled Growing Local to continue their workshops, which inspire children, young people and their families in growing and cooking.

- **14 Family Cook Workshops at the Kindle Centre**

Children attended with a family member or carer and cooked together a super-tasty, super-fun, healthy lunch using veggies from Southside Farm. Most sessions were at the Kindle Centre, two in the summer holidays were at the Tupsley Whitehouse Community Hub. Each session had a different foodie theme.

Family cook workshops aim to improve family cohesion, inspiring co-cooking at home and cooking from scratch. Families are encouraged to make better food choices and consume more fruit and vegetables. In addition, they offer families the opportunity to make new friends in the community and to socialise through the medium of cooking and eating together.



Children enjoying Family Cook Workshops

- **13 Garden-based family holiday workshops at The Southside Farm**

The workshops were targeted at the South Wye community by distributing physical fliers to all local schools in South Wye before the summer 2024 holidays - Blackmarston, Riverside, Our Lady's, St Martins, Marlbrook and Lord Scudamore and also to the Kindle Centre users.

Sessions focused on garden, growing, craft and construction activities, but also included a homemade DIY lunch picked from the garden (typically a DIY wrap or sandwich, homemade hummus, grated cheese, loads of salads from the garden, fresh fruit and homemade flapjack).

Most children attended both the indoor cook sessions and outdoor garden sessions, which naturally complemented each other and allowed opportunities to see where the veggies they were eating were grown. They helped tend the plants and harvest their own veggies, which they got to cook with. Each Garden Session had a different activity theme.

The project has provided **meaningful connections, improved sense of wellbeing** and **strengthened reach to families in need**.

Growing Local workshops have brought together groups of families from the community of South Wye. Many of these families have returned for other sessions and attended the Big Eat community cook events. Many have started volunteering and bought vegetables grown at Southside, too.

“We feel this has driven a greater sense of belonging to our community, both for ourselves as a new project and for the families involved. Family friendships have been forged.”



Garden Workshops with Growing Local

Improved health and wellbeing

The project met the county Health and Wellbeing strategy through improvements to diets, cooking from scratch, eating more fruit and vegetables, and choosing better ingredients.

Improvements in family cohesion by shared tasks, cooking together, and growing together

- **Best start in life (0-5)** – capturing children’s interest in growing and cooking together at an early stage
- Healthy and Sustainable Places is the core ethos @ The Southside Farm
- Healthy People - all visitors are encouraged to take control of their diets and food choices
- Improved access to local services - many of the activities helped construct permanent elements of the garden
- Reduce the carbon footprint – Growing Local workshops showcase recycling, upcycling and address food waste issues

The long-term project aim is to improve the social mobility of the local community of South Wye by offering new opportunities for volunteering, workshop participation and employment opportunities.

Volunteer opportunities

Many of the sessional staff members brought their older children along who wanted to take part. They started helping with a few simple tasks like washing up or helping with games and went on to run entire activity or cook areas, which they planned and organised themselves. Many new youth volunteers have approached Growing Local to help, including those from the Growing Local DofE gardening group.

Story of change

“One of our most regular visitors initially came to our farm and the Kindle centre sessions in the summer holidays. She walked to our farm from Newton Farm with her mum. The first time we met her, she would not try any of the foods we had, despite helping to pick the salads or cook the dishes.

She was really nervous and quiet, and clung to her mum - as a single child, she appeared especially 'clingy'. Luckily, her mum booked many sessions. After a few sessions, she started to talk and unbelievably started to try foods and taste things even if she didn't like them. Her mum was amazed, especially at the eating! During the February half-term and Easter holiday sessions, she was so familiar and comfortable with us that her mum was able to drop her with us and pick her up at the end - and we always reported how many things she tried eating and how much she seemed to enjoy herself and engage with everyone. Her confidence has literally skyrocketed!”

Louisa Foti, Growing Local

Hereford Nurture through Nature CIC

Herefordshire Nurture through Nature aims to improve people's wellbeing through activities that enhance a connection to nature. There is a strong focus on supporting people who are vulnerable and marginalised. The award from Herefordshire Together Fund of £880 has allowed a continuation of this work.

- **10 outdoor playgroup sessions in Hereford (South Wye) and ten in Leominster.**

60 parents/ carers attended sessions in Hereford and Leominster, where they were able to connect with nature and make new friendships.

Each session was set up to encourage healthy child development and also to enable parents and carers to meet up, enjoy hot drinks and snacks, build connections with each other and nature. It was possible to signpost parents and carers to sources of support. Sessions at Saxon Hall for young adults with disabilities were complemented by their wonderful outdoor area.

The project not only met the county's health and wellbeing priorities of: [Best start in life \(0-5 year olds\)](#) and [Good mental wellbeing throughout life](#), but also provided opportunities for parents to make [lasting meaningful connections](#) for people [to improve emotional wellbeing and sense of community](#).

As one parent commented: *[“I just feel better for being outside each week!”](#)*



Children's activities at Leominster Children's Centre

Many of the attending adults stated that they felt lonely and some said they didn't have any adult friends whom they could talk to. New friendships were formed as the children played and these were developed over the ten weeks. The adults also benefited from taking part in nature connection activities.

For example, one week showed the group how to drill a hole in a wooden 'cookie' and make a medal. The adults were just as interested as the children and spent a long time learning this new skill. This was a chance for the adults to take part in mindful activities in nature. Many of the attending adults felt excluded from their community due to racism or other issues. Attending the sessions enabled them to share their experiences and feel a stronger sense of community. The project also improved the emotional wellbeing of the children. They were supported to play outside and learn new skills, as well as enjoying stories and songs outside.

Reaching families in need

Sarah Watkins worked with local schools and groups such as Women's Aid to encourage families in need to attend.

People who attended have varying levels of need. Issues include: domestic violence, bereavement, depression, poverty, isolation, parenting problems, learning difficulties

Many of the adults attending were initially anxious about coming and required a lot of encouragement and reassurance.. After attending one session, people felt it was a non-intimidating space and returned in the following weeks. A supportive group formed in both locations and attendees felt more supported through these new connections. It was useful to work in partnership with Herefordshire Children's Centre, as they were able to refer people and offer additional support if necessary.



Children playing outside

Best start in Life

One of the main priorities of the project was the **best start in life** for children, and many vulnerable children attended.

They had the opportunity each week to listen to stories (boosting their literacy), learn new skills, use tools (improving their motor skills and coordination), enjoy time outside in nature and enjoy free food, including fruit and vegetables. Many of the parents commented that they had gone on to use the activities introduced during these sessions at home. They appreciated being shown low-cost ways to engage with their children.

Good mental wellbeing throughout life

Spending time in nature has been proven to be a great way to boost wellbeing. Many of the parents said they didn't usually spend this much time outside and that they felt it helped their mental health. Sarah also helped the families develop new healthy habits.

“One parent, who has learning difficulties, admits that she finds parenting hard and has two children under the age of 4. She would arrive very early each week and we could talk about how her week had been. She would often ask for parenting advice. Without any prompting, she has sent me photos each week of her and her three-year-old doing the activities at home again.

One week she sent me photos of the cress we had planted. This parent asked me a lot of questions and evidently learned a lot. For example, she told me that she didn't know what cress was before our session. She has asked me questions about her baby and I have been able to link her up with support services. I can tell that these sessions have had a real impact on the family.”

Sarah Watkins, Hereford Nature through Nature

Sessions in Leominster were much busier than anticipated, as was the high number of women who had suffered domestic abuse – these women have now formed an unofficial support network. Hereford Nature through Nature had not anticipated that parents and carers would replicate the activities at home and there were lots of questions about how they could do this. For example, they were shown how to make a cheap and effective bubble mix using detergent and baking powder.



Child chalk drawing with Hereford Nurture through Nature

Open Arms Kington (OAK) CIC

OAK's vision is 'For Kington to be a welcoming, inclusive place that provides opportunities for all, and which fosters community, growth and resilience – a place where good things happen every day'.

Kington is Herefordshire's smallest and poorest market town, ranked in the top 10% of England's indices of deprivation for housing and the top 20% for lack of access to services. Over 50% of poorer households cannot afford 'affordable housing' and 21% don't have access to a car. Social and economic opportunities are severely constrained by the long distance to larger urban centres and the lack and cost of public transport. Consultation with over 100 local 13-25 year olds in 2022 found many had a sense of melancholy about their futures, often linked to the inaccessibility of opportunities and services available to urban-based young people. Increasing numbers of local households are affected by drug use or addiction.

The Oxford Arms aims to be a catalyst for change and an initiative that helps **strengthen connections between people and place**. By conserving and 'reinventing' a historic building as a community hub, they will create an inclusive and vibrant space that celebrates collective action and strengthens individual and community resilience. They intend to conserve it as a heritage building and cherished pub whilst transforming under-utilised space into a multi-purpose community hub for Kington. Plans include the provision of a community café/bistro, youth hub, a community space for locally run activities, as well as service provision such as the CAB

The award from the Hereford Together Fund of £20,000 contributed to the cost of a part-time community worker for 12 months, initially as part of a community engagement programme, which is separate from the work to renovate and restore the Oxford Arms itself. Being able to employ a skilled and experienced Community Engagement Coordinator has been vital to what OAK has been able to achieve and offer in Kington.

OAKS team of volunteers is growing steadily and feedback indicates qualitative volunteer roles and experience the project offers are highly valued.

Activities:

- Monthly Creative Crafts Workshops on Sunday afternoons
- Place of Welcome every week
- Mindfulness - making mandalas with Wonky Mandalas
- Creative Writing classes with Sarah Star of Wordcraft (two six week courses so far)
- Heritage Days (exhibition, guided walk, film, children's activity, cream teas)

- VE Day Event (live jive show and classes in the yard, memorabilia table, vintage teas)
- Host for Kington Walking Festival events
- Volunteer 'do' days and training
- Help to create Healthy Habits - workshop
- Weekly Chair Yoga
- Heart Health Checks with Herefordshire Healthwatch, Taurus Healthcare, Local Social Prescriber and Talk Community (Talk well-being health day organised for the 30th January and 25th April)
- Being part of annual events: Kington Wheelbarrow race; Kington Vintage Festival,
- The National Big Draw - celebrating Diwali

All events were free and accessible to all. Examples of these activities can be seen on the OAK CIC website <https://www.openarmskington.co.uk/>



Diwali celebrations at Open Arms Kington (OAK)

Create lasting meaningful connection for people to improve emotional wellbeing and sense of community

One year on and OAK believes the project will meet this aim over time. They have collected case studies from 8 individuals, ranging in age from 22 to 71, who have in different ways engaged with the activities provided - some as volunteers, some as participants, and some who have transitioned from participants to volunteers. Each case study comprises 4-5 hour-long active listening semi-structured one on one interviews. The results show how, in each case, in different ways, their lives are being helped and enriched through their engagement with OAK. They confirm and surpass the expectations of what the project could aspire to achieve in terms of a sense of belonging and reduced isolation.

This has provided evidence that OAK is on the right track to becoming a place that can provide a high-level, qualitative volunteering and volunteer-run experience, whilst building social connections and reducing loneliness.

Places of Welcome

Recognising the complexity of engagement, which may one day lift participants and visitors and be less inspiring on another, OAK is striving to provide a consistent and predictable experience to engage with. With this in mind, they became a Place of Welcome in November 2024. Every Wednesday morning, the Oxford Arms (currently in the barn) is a place to come and share, or just be oneself in a quiet space, depending on what a person wants - from sharing emotions to OAK helping signpost potential services that they need. Free refreshments are provided and there is always someone there who can be in the background or actively engage.

“It was launched in a very low-key way, so as not to over-blow what is meant to be an organic and quite simple offering. Out of this regular Wednesday pattern, Sunflower Socials has emerged - a once monthly parallel meeting space for people with hidden disabilities set up by someone who had come along to Places of Welcome desperate for social contact and found that it didn't just lift his spirits, but that he was able to help others too. This seems to sum up what we are learning is the truly catalytic human potential of OAK and the community.”

Health and Wellbeing

Three community health days have been held at the Oxford Arms since working with Herefordshire Together and Healthwatch Herefordshire and more are planned for the future. This has been great partnership work and included a collective of groups:

- Taurus nurses doing Heart Health checks
- Healthwatch Herefordshire

- Talk community
- Dementia matters
- Age UK
- Kington Social Prescriber
- Healthy lifestyles
- Severn Wye energy

OAK CIC has appreciated Hereford Together networking events, which have led to further professional relationships. Such as those with Milly from @ The Hub in Ross and Paddy at E.F Bulmer Trust, which led to a successful funding application for a further community engagement project.



Health Days and Chatty Van

Ambrose's Story

We registered as a 'Places of Welcome' (PoW) venue at the Oxford Arms last November, and run drop-in sessions every Wednesday. Ambrose regularly comes. He's a young man, a husband and father. When he first turned up it was clear that he really needed the company and supportive atmosphere POW offers. Life-changing MS had forced him from being "an active man", teacher and professional blacksmith to someone who, in his words, "was just sitting at home in a huddle". PoW made him realise how "humans crave social interaction". At PoW, Ambrose found the space to talk with other people about his difficult journey - facing his diagnosis and having to "reinvent myself". In the process, he realised his experience could help others.

Supported by Kim (the Community engagement coordinator), Ambrose set up a monthly support group that he's called Sunflower Socials - it's a space run by him at The Oxford for people with hidden disabilities to meet, talk and share. This is proving to be much-needed, drawing together people with ME, MS, PTSD, physical paralysis, amongst others. Ambrose leads with confidence and it is blossoming.

Ambrose says he feels "more confident - I've got a reason to get out bed in the morning". He says his mental health has "improved no end". He is actively taking up other opportunities available through the project: First Aid at Work course, Mental Health First Aid, and he's become a much valued advisor and 'critical friend' for OAK and a member of our learning panel. He says he didn't set out to do volunteering or training, he "just arrived at this position," but he finds what he does with OAK is relevant and worthwhile and has a positive effect on other aspects of his life."

Open Arms Kington (OAK) CIC



OAK Activities