

IMPACT REPORT

APRIL 2021 - MARCH 2022



Who are we?

Our Mission:

To work with people across all sectors to make a positive and sustained impact on the wellbeing of local people through Support, Knowledge, Voice, Infrastructure and Innovation.

Our Vision:

Working to build inclusive, empowering and vibrant local communities.

Our Values:



Our Aims and Objectives:

- A more independent, effective and sustainable voluntary sector.
- Improved Access to volunteering and volunteers.
- Individuals and communities are more connected, supported and independent and have enhanced wellbeing.
- During the pandemic, local people who need help are supported and kept as safe as possible by our new services.

What we do:

- Build capacity in the local voluntary and community sector through specialist services and resources, enabling them to maximise their impact and sustainability.
- Work towards ensuring that all local people can access excellent, inclusive volunteering information/brokerage services, and all local voluntary sector organisations can access excellent, inclusive volunteer management support.
- Encourage, facilitate and develop opportunities to enable individuals to be as independent as possible, leading them to be happier and safer.
- Balance our social purpose and our focus on sustainability. Deliver high quality services for local people, member organisations and communities.

Our Year: April 2021 – March 2022

It has been another challenging year for the voluntary sector, with the continued impact of COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, the Afghan refugee situation, and the cost of living crisis. We have delivered a number of projects and services for the voluntary sector and residents, whilst responding effectively to rapidly unfolding events.

Despite the easing of pandemic restrictions, many residents have continued to feel isolated and vulnerable. We have maintained our COVID-19 support services for residents who were relying heavily on these, including our shopping delivery, medicine collection, pulse oximeter and telephone befriending services.

In October we merged with the Volunteer Centre for Broxbourne and East Herts, swiftly increasing our volunteer network to include two new boroughs. This merger demonstrated the organisation's capacity, as well as the staff's ability to adapt. It has resulted in our Volunteer Centre delivering a more comprehensive service to the local area.

Since July we have also been working with a number of national charities, including NAVCA and NCVO, to develop an inclusive national strategy for volunteering, that has been adopted by Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

After becoming the Local Lead organisation for the South East region of the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP), we have established a network of key organisations through which to share information and build connections, strengthening the sector. We have made connections between local and national

bodies, as well as amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups, representing these to public sector organisations.

The work we have done to strengthen the local emergency response effort has been particularly pertinent to the Afghanistan and Ukraine crises that have emerged over the past year. Communities 1st has played a crucial role in coordinating the county-wide response to the Ukraine crisis, and providing support to Afghan refugee families locally.

Whilst reinforcing the local voluntary sector and providing our own support services, we have continued to deliver consistent support to vaccination centres across Hertfordshire, Bedford, Luton and West Essex. Despite vaccination volunteering beginning to subside, we continue to manage the 3,000 volunteers that remained with us.

After strengthening our ties with NHS partners, we were asked to launch the International NHS nurses buddy scheme, that has so far proved popular and effective. Over 80 NHS recruits have been given a Communities 1st buddy to help them settle into the local community.

By adapting and evolving over the past year, we have risen to the many challenges that our communities have faced, and have continued to build resilience within them.



Jason John
Chair



Stephen Craker
Chief Executive
Officer



The Kickstart programme takes off



We say thank you to our volunteers



Community Transport continues

A more independent, effective and sustainable voluntary sector.

24

Stronger Together Network meetings took place, bringing together local groups with similar aims to share best practice and solve common issues.

50

organisations were supported with funding applications.



Promoting our Meet the Funder events and Inspire resource.

29

organisations attended our virtual Trustee Speed Matching Sessions, pairing potential trustees with local charities.



Providing a safe space for vulnerable people at St Albans Food and Drink Festival.

12,000

lateral flow testing kits were distributed across 100+ local Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise organisations.

78

voluntary sector groups received support and advice, including through weekly coffee mornings.

170

litres of hand sanitizer were distributed across local organisations.

7

Meet the Funder events were hosted, helping participants to know how best to apply for specific funding streams.

We launched the second stage of the Inspire project and created a new suite of mentoring videos to share with local schools.

61

Kickstart vacancies were filled across 10 charities, through the Communities 1st gateway.

100k

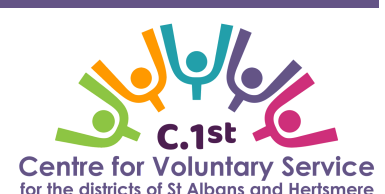
of funding was accessed by local voluntary sector organisations, due to our support and guidance.

"Thank you for your help with the application for the community project fund – we received the full amount we applied for." - Arts on Prescription

"Our finances are now on a firm footing. Many thanks for your help and support." - REMAP

"We have a completely full group for the residency ... Thank you for all your help and what Communities 1st does." - H'arts in Mind

"Alex has bedded-in well, works hard and effectively, and is now a part of their team." - Ian, Sunny Side Rural Trust



Improved Access to Volunteering and Volunteers

639

new individuals were provided with support to get into volunteering roles.

We strengthened and widened our volunteer network across Hertfordshire after merging with the Volunteer Centre for Broxbourne and East Herts.

630

people have attended 48 training sessions we organised with partners.



Vaccination volunteers at Harlow Hospital and our Volunteer Centre at a job fair.

7,000

individuals received newsletters every other week, advertising local volunteering opportunities.



Received award from the Borough of Broxbourne for coordination of Broxbourne vaccination centre volunteers.

150k

hours of volunteering were completed in vaccination centres across Hertfordshire, Milton Keynes, West Essex, Bedford and Luton.

4

job clinics were run for local Afghan refugees, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council and the local NHS, which included assessments and CV sessions.

30

sports organisations were engaged with for Herts Sports Partnership volunteer recruitment across St Albans, Hertsmere, Broxbourne and East Herts.

9

people were supported through the Able2Enable project, whilst seven organisations are completing training as Able to enable allies.

Our new online Volunteer Centre was created, streamlining volunteer recruitment for our members.

4

Volunteer Management Training sessions were delivered, on recruiting, retaining and managing volunteers.

"I was just amazed at the training ... It opened up my awareness and has made me much more aware".

- Elaine (Volunteer who attended our Suicide Intervention Training)

"(The event organisers) were great at bringing everyone in and getting people involved."

- John (who attended a Trustee Speed Matching Session)

"It's nice to see how grateful the organisations are when you've found them a volunteer they really needed."

- Jeremy (Volunteer Centre Liaison Officer)

Communities 1st
Volunteer Centre
 Helping you to make a bigger difference
 St Albans, Hertsmere, Broxbourne and East Herts

Individuals and Communities are More Connected, Supported and Independent

343

jobs were carried out for vulnerable residents with our Handy person service.

1,107

People have been helped in our Healthy Hub, that offers people wellbeing advice and guidance.

1,096

journeys have been carried out with the Community Car Service, taking people to vaccinations, hospital appointments, and other destinations.

9,788

requests for help were responded to across Hertsmere, St Albans, Broxbourne and East Herts, including prescription medicine collection, shopping deliveries and telephone befriending.



Thank you events for volunteers!

3,000

people received weekly newsletters containing wellbeing resources and information.



Food made by Afghan families at a cooking class.

13

Outreach Hubs were run, offering support and advice to residents and voluntary organisations.

1,441

Telephone befriending calls were carried out to those who are isolated and lonely.



Sharing our information and resources at job fairs.

"The service provided is such a huge help I would certainly be lost without it."

- Louise (Handyperson service client)

"They're so reliable and so nice ... (he) doesn't know what they would do without them". - John (Shopping service client)

"The drivers were very helpful and sympathetic, they've gone the extra mile."

- Mary (client using Community Car scheme).

"It's been a great help for me, some of the drivers have been fantastic. ... To me, it's been a god send."

- Helen (Client using the shopper bus service).



Other Communities 1st Projects

Afghan Refugees

We developed an up-to-date micro website with resources and event information for the Afghan families.

160

support activities for Afghans residing locally delivered, allowing them to get outside, be active and meet people, as well as taking them to and from activities.



Staff on a day trip to Aldenham Park with Afghan families.

Community Champions

people received information, disseminated by over 30 Community Information Champions, around local health and wellbeing resources and advice.

200k

Digital Champions

learners regularly accessing our 'Learn My Way' digital course, as well as 7 digital champions supporting drop in clients at many of our Hubs.

11

desktop machines were recycled and four devices donated to those in digital poverty.

8



NHS recruits visit St Albans Cathedral and attend a local football match!

81

NHS Recruits Buddy Scheme

Nurses are enrolled on our NHS International Nurse Buddy scheme, which provides one to one support as well as group outings to local places of interest.



Volunteers take NHS nurses to Verulamium Park and the British Museum.

Covid Response

As well as delivering shopping and prescription medicine, we have continued to deliver pulse oximeters to those suffering with COVID-19 symptoms.

Ukraine Crisis

Created a hub of accurate, up-to-date information and support resources for those arriving from Ukraine, those hosting Ukrainians, and organisations supporting them.

Monitored the local response via social media, contacting the voluntary sector organisations taking action and offering them support.



Drivers preparing to take groups to activities.

What Does the Future Hold for Communities 1st?

While acknowledging the positive impact we have had on our communities over the past year, we remain consistently focused on how we might further improve that positive impact by considering the most effective strategy to adopt.

Our strategic plan for the next four years outlines our vision and goals, as well as the deliverables we will use to measure these. The strategy has been shaped by volunteers, staff, trustees and stakeholders, and informed by Nottingham Trent and Sheffield Hallam's evaluation of Communities 1st. The plan responds not only to the organisational strengths identified over the past year, but the areas for growth and improvement.

Over the next four years, we will work closely with people, members and partners to increase our impact and continue to strengthen local communities. We aim to create sustainable, focussed and impactful projects that support and build resilience within communities. We recognise the diversity within our communities, and will build inclusion and awareness into our delivery.

With this approach, and through regular reviews of our goals and progress, we believe we can deliver our new vision - to build strong local communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and make a difference.

Communities 1st Factfile

Registered Office

2 Allum Lane, Elstree WD6 3PJ

St Albans Office

Civic Centre, St Peters Street,
St Albans AL1 3JE

Community Hubs

Leeming Road
Borehamwood WD6 4EB

Manor Court
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Company and Charity Registration

Registered in England and Wales
as a Company Limited
by Guarantee No: 11875362.
Registered Charity No: 1187164.

Contact Details

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Accountants

Bradshaw and Johnson LLP

Board of Directors / Trustees

Jason John (Chair)
Sarah Yexley (Vice-Chair)
Ross Gemmell (Treasurer)
Chris Cloke
Joy Dobbs
Ann Harrison
John Howson
Sue Pearlman
Ann Rogers
Tom Slatter
Karl Wilding

Company Secretary and Chief Executive

Stephen Craker

Finally, we would like to say a huge thank you to all our volunteers, who make everything we do possible. Thank you!

