

IMPACT REPORT

APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023



Chair's Foreword

'Working with you to make a bigger difference' - that's the strapline from our new four-year strategic plan which we launched in 2022 and I am delighted to say that I believe we are doing just that.

'As you read through this impact report you will see how our work has moved on from the pandemic, but not eased off! It is our responsibility to be an ever-changing organisation, responding to the circumstances and the environment in which we work. It is impossible for us to do that alone and essential that we collaborate with you, our residents, volunteers, community organisations, statutory and business partners to deliver the best we can for our communities. I think we have done that and I consider it an accolade to all involved to see how much has been achieved. I hope you agree.



Jason John, Chair

Who are we?

Our Mission:

To partner with local communities, turning knowledge and energy into action and progress.

Our Vision:

Strong local communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and make a difference.

Our Values:



Our Goals:

- To develop a more resilient, effective and representative local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector.
- To ensure volunteering is more recognised, visible and valued in the community, providing improved community well being and personal development.
- To achieve improved health and well being where individuals facing barriers or experiencing inequalities are supported and resilient.
- To be a sustainable, inclusive and responsible organisation driven by our values.

Chief Executive's Summary of the Year

It's been another year of significant change. Whilst the impact of COVID has subsided the demands arising from other issues have grown and presented new challenges. We have taken things in our stride and responded well with an adaptable approach. By the end of the year Communities 1st and its services looked quite different from what they were at the beginning.



During the first half of the year, as the country started to recover from the COVID pandemic, our activity began to reflect this. The vaccination programme slowed down, as did the requests for volunteer support and we stopped delivering pulse oximeters in June. Many individuals were able to turn back to their family and friends for help, so the number of clients requiring support with shopping, prescription collection and other practical tasks declined markedly. We have continued to provide a service to people who have little or no alternative support structures in place and the numbers are still significant, but they are nowhere near those we experienced during the height of the pandemic.

Meanwhile other activity has ramped up. Following the breakout of war in Ukraine in February 2022, Communities 1st worked with County and District Councils, the NHS and our voluntary and community partners to coordinate our response. We have held regular peer to peer support groups for Ukrainian arrivals and their hosts, set up our 'Herts with Ukraine' website, provided advice, information and signposted people onto relevant services and given practical assistance with community transport as required. We are starting to see the benefits of this with a number of Ukrainians becoming increasingly independent and less reliant on our and others support.

The rising costs of living has presented us with challenges throughout the year – and still does. In addition to cascading information and directing people to sources of help, we have spent time working with VCFSE organisations to support the warm space initiative. With funding received from local authorities and a philanthropic partner we have provided three warm spaces ourselves and facilitated the establishment of 12 others. We are currently evaluating the scheme to help plan for next winter and any 'cool spaces' which may be needed in the summer months.



The Multiply Project is another new initiative that we helped launch this year. It's a national scheme headed up by the Department of Education, intended to help adults develop their numeracy skills, unlocking job opportunities and/or a return to education. Working with Step2Skills and other partners, we have encouraged people to get involved and sign up for our new workshops designed to improve individual's confidence with numbers. We've had some great feedback!

Chief Executive's Summary of the Year (continued...)

Turning back to health issues, we have been fortunate to receive NHS funding to work with our partners to address targeted areas of clinical need. A new project 'Our Health Matters' commenced in October 2022. Focusing on two of the most deprived wards in Hertsmere, we have been talking to residents about the barriers they face when accessing health services and working with NHS colleagues to consider how best to overcome them. Our work culminated in a highly successful Health and Cancer Awareness event which was held at Aberford Hall in March 2023.



Our involvement in the NHS international staff recruitment work has also expanded. With the help of our volunteer buddies we have successfully supported the new recruits settle into their new life and find their way around their new surroundings. Our NHS partners at Watford and Lister Hospitals have placed high value on our contribution noting the positive impact it has had on staff wellbeing, so much so that they spread the word and the service has now expanded to include Herts Community NHS Trust and Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust.



Alongside all of this we have continued with our core business of supporting and representing local VCFSE organisations, and promoting and brokering volunteer opportunities. Our Stronger Together Networks (STNs) have expanded to reflect the changing environment in which we work. This year we have introduced three new networking groups for those working with refugees and asylum seekers, a forum for volunteer managers and another group focusing on equality and diversity. This year we also launched 'Let's Give', a new service for volunteers enabling them to upload information about their skills and interests onto our website, allowing volunteer involving organisations to reach out to them about potential volunteering roles.

From my perspective these have been the highlights of the year. We have had to support our volunteers, staff, trustees, funders, VCFSE organisations and partners throughout this change and development, and in the middle of it all we moved offices. The relocation may have been a little disruptive at the time but now we are ensconced in our new home, it has allowed us to bring all our staff together in one place and enabled a much greater sense of 'team' and coordinated working.

It remains for me to thank all our volunteers and staff for their incredible hard work and for all that they have achieved as detailed in the remainder of this report.



**Stephen Craker,
Chief Executive
Officer**

A more resilient, effective and representative local VCFSE sector

£489k+

Secured by local VCFSE organisations following our involvement.



204

Organisations supported through our social prescribing work across the East of England.



67

VCFSE organisations provided with 1:1 development support and advice.



44

VCFSE organisations provided with 1:1 funding advice.



28

Stronger Together Network meetings held, bringing together local groups with similar aims to share best practice.



24

VCFSE organisations involved in our emergency partnership work across the south east region.



12

VCFSE organisations supported to establish a Warm Welcome space.



4

Meet the Funder events held to help participants apply to specific funding bodies.



“Thanks to your helpful advice, support and review of our application to St Albans and District Council's Community Project Fund, I am pleased to say we have been successful! You always go the extra mile to help us.”

Representative from Trinity Community Partnership, St Albans

“The warm space experience was definitely a positive one. Those that came in really welcomed having the option to go somewhere welcoming, non-judgemental, and safe.”

Representative from Create Community CIC, Letchworth

“Thank you for all of the work you've done to gather in more people to join, learn and share in our scenario planning exercises.”

Representative from Voluntary and Community Sector Emergency Partnership.



Centre for Voluntary Service
for the districts of St Albans and Hertsmere

Volunteering is more recognised, visible and valued

4,800

individuals received fortnightly Volunteer Centre newsletter

325

people attended 37 training sessions for volunteers and volunteer managers

303

volunteer applications received for non-Covid roles

150

students participated in an interview skills exercise delivered by 20 volunteers

115

new volunteering opportunities advertised

39

individuals supported by Able2Enable to overcome barriers to volunteering and social engagement

16

local businesses engaged with Communities 1st to facilitate skill sharing and volunteering opportunities.



“I'd always thought about volunteering but never got around to it, but now I wish I'd committed before. It's really rewarding and a lot of fun.”
Volunteer placed with St Albans Talking Newspaper

"I am more aware of some of the challenges a deaf person may face. I learnt ways of getting a deaf person's attention and some signs that I can continue to practice and use."
Volunteer attending training course on Introduction to British Sign Language

"Speaking to the students it was clear that they really enjoyed the experience and gained a lot from it. I would love to welcome you back to our school in the future."
Assistant Headteacher, Yavneh College, Borehamwood

"This makes me realise there is more to me than my disabilities. I have strengths and passions and so much more that I wouldn't have discovered without the programme."
Client of Able2Enable



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

Improved health and well being



1,671

Enquiries received and responded to via the Healthy Hubs.



189

Christmas well being phone calls undertaken.



170

People attended Health and Cancer Awareness event benefitting from onsite health checks and associated advice.



124

Community Information Champions have shared well being messages with over 200,000 people in their networks.



98

Christmas welfare visits undertaken.



15+

People attended weekly bowls session at Aberford Hall.



9

Better Days Hubs supported on a regular basis providing information and advice to local residents.



4

Primary Care Networks supported to run peer-to-peer groups every fortnight to help patients with long-term conditions.



“I broadcasted a 15 minute slot on Radio Verulam called 'Health Matters' which was always 'on message'. Volunteering to support people living in St Albans is a privilege and through volunteering I am able to support people who, for whatever reason, need that support.”

Community Information Champion

“Such a nice gentleman. As we seemed to get on so well on the phone, I asked him if he would like me to call regularly. He readily agreed, so we've arranged to have regular chats. He seemed really pleased. So am !!”

Volunteer undertaking Christmas well being calls

“I am the carer of an 80-year-old gentleman who has cancer. It was good to be able to talk to so many expert organisations in one place.”

Participant of Health and Cancer Awareness event



Communities 1st
Wellbeing Support

Connecting you with help and wellbeing services

A sustainable, inclusive and responsible organisation driven by our values.

2,552

practical tasks delivered - mainly shopping and prescription collection

1,265

telephone befriending calls made

958

people attended 272 Shopper Bus trips

756

health and social care trips delivered by the Community Car service

390

jobs carried out for vulnerable residents via our Handy person service

216

people engaged in our Multiply project designed to help adults improve their numeracy skills

142

International NHS Recruits supported to settle into their new life and work in the region

135

people helped to use their phones and IT equipment at our Computers and a Cuppa sessions.

72

peer-to-peer support meetings arranged for Ukrainian arrivals and their hosts



“The driver is always so friendly and helpful and the service is exceptional. It means I can get out of the house every week.”

Client of the Shopper Bus service

“My buddy helped me a lot, from showing me around and giving me information about the country. I have also had help looking for accommodation. I know for a fact that I would have been lost without her.”

International NHS Recruit

“Just to say thank you for taking me to my hospital appointments. I don't know how I would have managed otherwise. Thanks to the team who facilitates this and the volunteers who help me.”

Client of the Community Car service

” **Making a Difference**
Empowering local volunteering.

What Does the Future Hold for Communities 1st?

As we move towards 'business as usual' in the post-pandemic world it is becoming increasingly obvious that funding pressures are reinstating themselves as a more significant driver of events. Whilst there may be increasing competition for funds, the demand for services is not declining, the cost of living crisis impacting on individuals' own financial circumstances and events both at home and abroad affecting the vulnerability of our community. So, our work must continue in challenging times.



We must build on our strengths, drawing on our experience to date, the knowledge we have accumulated and the connections we have made. Our work through the pandemic has given us great insight into how we can add value working with our community, statutory and business partners. We have established a strong foundation from which we can continue this collective and collaborative work. We look forward to the months and year ahead.



We are driven to push forward with this modus operandi, helping to create strong local communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and make a difference.

We look forward to the months and year ahead.

Jason John, Chair

Stephen Craker, Chief Executive Officer

Thank You

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



Net Zero

Communities 1st are developing our Net Zero strategy and will start to report our annual progress against our carbon reduction targets in 2024. We are fully training all our workforce to become advocates for Net Zero across our organisations and local communities. We will seek best practice in our response to Net Zero and will actively share this with our hirers and clients across all our services. We aspire to becoming part of the solution to Climate Change and want our current and future clients to be part of that solution too.



Pay Gap

Communities 1st believes in equality of opportunity for all. Although Communities 1st employs fewer than 250 staff (44) and is therefore not required to publish gender pay gap information, we have chosen to and encourage other organisations in the sector to do so as well. At 1 April 2023, the median and mean male and female hourly earnings were as follows:

	Male Hourly Earnings (£)	Female Hourly Earnings (£)	Difference (£)	Difference (%)
Median	11.06	13.21	-2.15	-19.44
Mean	13.28	13.88	-0.60	-4.48

The UK gender pay gap reported by the Office for National Statistics in 2022 is 8.3% in favour of men. Communities 1st's median gender pay gap is 19.44% in favour of women and mean pay gap is 4.48% in favour of women. The gender pay gap is measured across all jobs, not of the difference in pay between men and women for doing the same job. Communities 1st's gender pay gap is not a concern, however gender pay and equal pay will continue to be monitored closely.



Memberships of National Organisations

Communities 1st is proud to be a member of the following national bodies to provide us, and our members, greater opportunities for national representation, networking, resources and influence for the voluntary and community sector locally.



Communities 1st Annual Accounts

We internally record our performance against outcomes for the organisation and the sector. We are pleased with the activity we have undertaken which meets our strategic headlines and also those that add value to our communities and the sector.

We have active 7,586 volunteers - 68% identifying as female, 37% as male and 1% self-defined - with 18,335 hours of volunteering, helping us to provide individual support alongside developing and sustaining the local voluntary and community sector.

Income from all sources was £1,738,693 in the year to 31 March 2023 (2021/22: £1,372,749). This financial year shows significant changes to the unrestricted income received and the associated expenditure, particularly where sums were received late in the financial year, but the activities and their expenditure occur in the subsequent year.

Of the income received, £134,000 (2021/22: £20,500) was restricted for specific programmes and projects, made up of grant income. The remaining income of £1,604,693 (2021/22: £1,352,249) was unrestricted, comprising grants, donations, membership income as well as revenue generated through SLAs and service delivery. Unrestricted income remains important to the financial sustainability of the charity.



	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 22/23
Incoming Resources	1,604,693	134,000	1,738,693
Resources Expended	1,392,314	15,500	1,407,696
Surplus (Deficit)	239,314	118,500	357,814

The Trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern (see also Accounting Policies (Note 2) in our Annual Accounts 22/23). The Trustees have reviewed the financial position, budgets and cash flows for the period to March 2023 and consider that the charity is in a position to meet its financial obligations as they fall due.



Pledges and Quality Marks

Aligned with our values, our organisational commitments focus on fair wages, inclusivity, armed forces support, employee and volunteer well-being.



Communities 1st Factfile

Registered Office

1st Floor, Ver House, Park Estate, Frogmore, St Albans, AL2 2WH

Community Hubs

Civic Centre, St Albans, AL1 3JE

Leeming Road, Borehamwood, WD6 4EB

Manor Court, Waltham Cross, EN8 7SL

Accountants

Bradshaw Johnson Chartered Accountant and Statutory Auditors

Board of Directors / Trustees

Jason John (Chair)

Sarah Yexley (Vice-Chair)

Ross Gemmell (Treasurer)

Ann Harrison

Ann Rogers

Chris Cloke

John Hoson

Joy Dobbs

Karl Wilding

Sue Pearlman

Company Secretary and Chief Executive

Stephen Craker

Contact Details

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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.

