

Spark Somerset – Monitoring Report

1ST APRIL 2021 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021



In the last 6 months ...

258
GROUPS 
received 1-2-1 support

£395,648



was raised for local groups,
with more to come!



239 volunteering
opportunities



308
DBS CHECKS

62
organisations

**Spark a
Change**

261
volunteers

35
Groups received
strategic funding
& bid-writing
support

529



training/forum
attendees

1 TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Sector & Partnership Development.....	3
1.1	Support and guidance for VCS groups	3
1.2	Training	4
1.3	Newsletters and Online Support	4
1.4	Forums	5
1.5	Partnerships and Collaboration.....	6
2	Funding:	7
2.1	Support for groups.....	7
2.2	Highlights:.....	7
2.3	Partnerships	8
3	Volunteering and Social Action	8
3.1	Support for Organisations	9
3.2	Partnership support.....	10
3.3	Support for Volunteers	10
3.4	Special projects.....	11
4	Voice, Influence and Engagement	13
4.1	Strategic Representation.....	13
4.2	Consultation & Engagement	14
5	Support Development of Social Prescribing Activity	15
5.1	Thriving Communities Somerset.....	15
5.2	Wellbeing Directories	16
6	Appendix – Additional Testimonials & Case Studies	17
6.1	Mendip.....	17
6.2	South Somerset.....	17
6.3	Sedgemoor	18
6.4	Somerset West and Taunton	18

The report is based on the following key themes, as per the contract:

1. Sector and Partnership Development	Support the establishment and growth of VCSE groups, improve their effectiveness and governance, and demonstrate impact. Develop collaboration and partnerships to address local and strategic priorities.
2. Funding	Identify and promote funding opportunities and facilitate collaborative approaches to maximise funding for Somerset organisations; develop VCSE groups' capacity and expertise to secure external funding.
3. Volunteering and Social Action	Stimulate social action; supporting volunteers and encouraging businesses and individuals to take a greater role in their communities.
4. Voice, Influence, & Engagement	Improve and support communication and collaboration within and between sectors; strengthen the voice and influence of the sector to shape and design policy and delivery; act as independent advocate for Somerset's VCSE sector.
5. Support development of social prescribing activity	Support and develop formal and informal volunteering opportunities; communication of health and care-related topics; develop and maintain networks with VCSE groups and other stakeholders involved in social prescribing.

1 SECTOR & PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Support the establishment and growth of VCSE groups, improve their effectiveness and governance, and demonstrate impact. Develop collaboration and partnerships to address local and strategic priorities

1.1 SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR VCS GROUPS

In the 6 months from April to September 2021, one to one advice and support has been given to 258 groups:

- 95 groups in South Somerset
- 73 in Somerset West and Taunton
- 54 groups in Sedgemoor
- 36 groups in Mendip

Please note that, in addition to the District-funded posts, we also have Community Development workers in Chard, Bridgwater and Taunton, funded by the Lottery, that have positively impacted on these figures. Many groups come to us with a variety of needs and we often need to spend time working with them on more than one issue. Of the groups we worked with:

Governance/set up/business planning	84
Funding advice & support	63
Covid-19	26
Volunteering	55
Connections/partnerships	116
Community events & activities	43
Legal issues	7
Training	21

As a registered DBS provider, we offer advice for groups and a checking service. During this period:

- 308 DBS applications were processed
- 20 new organisations registered

Case studies and testimonials from each District can be found in the Appendices.

Case Study

“At South Chard Church we have a large focus on community. We have projects that connect with the lonely, with struggling parents and with the disadvantaged. We are also in the process of developing a new building project to create a community space to facilitate the work we are doing.

“The last few years has been tough for charities. But we have been supported in so many ways by Spark Somerset. Over the past six months they have continued to be available to us for any queries around funding (having provided us with bespoke fund-raising training for two of our volunteers earlier in the year). This ongoing support has been so encouraging to us as we are relatively new to the fundraising world.

“Through the work of Leonie Cole from Spark we now have access to Chard Connect. By pulling together representatives from the local VCSE sector, this group has facilitated multiple positive outcomes for us. We have met with people we would have never engaged with and those connections have produced opportunities for us to collaborate.

“We have also been able to access training for our volunteers and paid staff at an affordable rate (and at times free) through Spark Somerset. More recently we have trained two people in first aid and two people attended a dementia awareness training day. This access to training has proved invaluable to us. We are amazed at how Spark is there for us when we have questions around training. When we contact Penny Schofield with any queries around training needs (which we have done around bereavement training and trustee training, to name a few) she always gets back to us. Even if Spark Somerset can't provide the training, Penny takes the time to sign post us, reassuring us that we can come back to her if we need any further help.

“In short, the team have been outstanding. They are an absolute support to us and as we move forward with our community projects, we are so grateful to have them at our back.”

1.2 TRAINING

Much of our training support continued online throughout this period. We held 9 training workshops, attended by 99 delegates.

Date	Training Course	Total attendees	Mendip	S Somerset	SWT	Sedgemoor	Countywide
2/21	Volunteer Management	20	4	4	3	1	8
3/21	Trustee training	25	6	7	4	2	6
7/21	Sedgemoor Community Connect	20	-	-	-	20	-
4/21	Child Protection	15	2	2	7	-	3
4/21	Mental Health Awareness	15	2	-	2	1	3
6/21	Trustee Training	17	2	2	8	1	4
7/21	GDPR	9	-	1	2	2	4
9/21	Emergency First Aid at Work	12	2	4	2	-	4
9/21	Emergency First Aid at Work	11	11		-	-	-
TOTAL		99	8	20	21	24	18

Feedback on our training has been more difficult to gather since we have gone online. When the meetings are in person, forms can be completed in situ. However, participants are less likely to respond to request for feedback by email. That which we have received has been very positive – with some examples provided below:

“Thank you to all involved, for such an enjoyable and profitable morning yesterday. I shall be recommending the course on 6th May to my fellow trustees.”

Prior Confidence Average (1 not at all, 10 extremely): 5.6

Post Confidence average: 8.6

(Trustee Training, 25th April 2021)

“Like many others during the past 40 years I've attended numerous First Aid and HSE workshops. Yesterday's was by far the most engaging and valuable. I would certainly recommend the training to even the most experienced but uncertified people.”

How knowledgeable/confident did you feel about the topics covered before the session?

Average answer - 3.7

How knowledgeable/confident do you feel about the topics covered now you've attended the session?

Average answer – 8.7

(Emergency First Aid at Work, 29th September)

1.3 NEWSLETTERS AND ONLINE SUPPORT

In addition to the one-to-one support we provide for VCSE organisations, we also send regular bulletins and disseminate information and guidance via our website and social media.

Newsletter:

- 1610 subscribers
- 3 'general' newsletters (news, events, funding opps)
- 14 targeted newsletters:

I'm currently jumping around with joy and had to let you know that we were awarded IKEA Places called Home TNL community Fund today!

We applied for funding for our Community Clay Project. BUT a big thank you goes to your newsletter that I saw the opportunity on so please pass this onto your team and keep up the good work!

Chantelle, OSR Projects

Spark Somerset Website:

- 14,118 users
- 54,805 page views
- Top 5 pages visited:
 1. volunteer 3,869
 2. latest/jobs 3,279
 3. news-events 2,882
 4. somerset-funding-portal 1,611
 5. Training 1,277
- 197 downloads of the [Covid Confident Communities booklet](#), which was translated into Arabic, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian (working in partnership with Diversity Voice). Hard copies of the booklet have also been distributed to VCSE groups across Somerset.
- 750 downloads from the Resource Library (including guidance on Setting up, Governance etc)

1.4 FORUMS

In addition to training sessions focused on specific topics (see next section) we held a number of general networking and information Forums for VCSE groups. 36 events took place between April and September, attended by 430 delegates.

Month	Forum	Attendees
April	Mens Shed	14
	Mendip Community Forum	15
	Bridgwater Connect Forum	21
	Terms of Reference (Somerset Youth Work Alliance)	4
	Training Group (Somerset Youth Work Alliance)	4
	Community Food Forum	14
	Taunton Connect	19
	OMH Workshop	14
	Mens Shed	14
May	Covid Confident in the Community	24
	Training Group (Somerset Youth Work Alliance)	5
	Bridgwater Connect	19
	Covid Confident in the Community – Dealing with Anxiety	16
	Chard Connect	10
	Community Food Forum	17
	Mens Shed	9
	Terms of Reference (Somerset Youth Work Alliance)	5
	Getting your Group Going	32
June	Volunteer Coordinator Forum	18
	Bridgwater Connect Forum	21
	Taunton Connect Forum	9
	Grow for Good Forum	11
	South Somerset Voluntary Sector Forum	13
July	Somerset Youth Work Alliance	13
	Bridgwater Connect	17
	Community Food Forum	6
August	Mens Shed	6
	Bridgwater Connect Forum	15
September	Terms of Reference and Training Group (Somerset Youth Work Alliance)	4
	RP (Research Project) SALC	
	RP Sedgemoor Swapshop	5
	RP Steering Group	3
	RP Community Resilience Cell	8
	RP Volunteer Coordinator Forum	12
	RP Chard Connect	12
RP Funding Forum	14	
Total		430

1.5 PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Partnerships and collaboration are at the heart of what we do. All of our work – face to face, events and online – seeks to encourage collaborative working. Many of the forums above have a clear focus on partnerships e.g. the Connect Forums, Grow for Good, Mens' Sheds etc.

Open Mental Health (where we Chair the VCSE Alliance) also continues to go from strength to strength and is being viewed as a model of good practice, both in Somerset, and nationally.

Other new work established in this period include:

Consortium approach to support commissioning of Children's Homes

We acted as an independent central point of contact for VCSE organisations who wished to form a consortium to apply for a contract to provide residential care and therapeutic education to children in Somerset. We supported the County Council by convening two partnerships meetings, liaising with interested partners and asking clarification questions of the commissioners on behalf of the group.

Somerset Youth Work Alliance

During the period April to September we held regular meetings of two working groups looking at:

- a) possible governance options for a formal alliance of youth work organisations across the County and
- b) ways to reinstate a professional youth work training offer within Somerset.

Ten key youth work providers from across the whole county have been actively engaged with this process and we expect to sign an agreement before the end of the year. Strode College are looking to deliver Youth Work qualifications (Level 2 Certificate and Level 3 Diploma) from early next year and we have been promised access to some of the funding from DCMS for the region to offer bursaries for training.

"Many thanks Penny and Alice. You guys at Spark are ideal to facilitate this... neutral and knowledgeable. Very much appreciated."

Craig - Director / Youth & Community Worker Youth Unlimited CIC

Mental Health Hub

We successfully won funding from Public Health to host the Mental Health Hub – continuing the progress already made by Mind in Somerset. The Hub will seek to encourage partnership working and collaboration between the wider VCSE sector, to support mental health in Somerset. A new Partnerships Manager joined our team in October 2021 (after the period of this report) and we will provide an update on this in due course.

2 FUNDING:

Identify and promote funding opportunities and facilitate collaborative approaches to maximise funding for Somerset organisations; develop VCSE groups' capacity and expertise to secure external funding

2.1 SUPPORT FOR GROUPS

35 groups from across Somerset have received bespoke, 1-2-1 support from the Spark Funding Team (this is in addition to the funding support provided by the Advice Team, detailed in the previous section):

- South Somerset 9
 - Somerset West and Taunton 7
 - Sedgemoor 4
 - Mendip 11
 - County Wide 4
- 14 of these groups received bespoke funding searches identifying numerous new funding potentials
 - 11 of these groups received support with bid writing,
 - 10 of these groups were supported by one of our specialist associate bid-writers,
 - £395,648 has been raised by the organisations supported in the last 6 months – however, we expect this figure to increase, as we await outcomes.

2.2 HIGHLIGHTS:

- £330,000 awarded to PROMISEworks from the National Lottery. The Spark Funding Team worked closely with their Trustees to put the application together.
- We supported Meare and Westhay Village Hall Committee with an application to Viridor for their brand new, state of the art community centre. They are into the final rounds with a potential £120,000 to be awarded. Outcomes due early in 2022. (We also supported them in a previous application which has resulted in £50,000 from Sports England)

Case Study: Stoma Heroes

"When I was asked by Shane (the founder of Stoma Heroes) if I would help trying to get such much needed funds for the charity, I thought "No problem, how hard can this be?" I put together a letter detailing what the charity is about and why we needed the funds and promptly set about posting dozens of letters to different associations, details of which I found on the Spark Somerset website. Months and months passed, and no one got back to me. I was obviously doing something wrong. I then saw that Spark were hosting a fundraising zoom meeting event, so I signed up.

"I would highly recommend it as there were so many people sharing ideas and talking about their experiences. Following on from this zoom meeting I was offered some 1:1 training from Spark Somerset to help me when completing applications for funding. I also had offers of help and ideas from the event.

"I am not going to lie - it's a minefield getting your head around these application forms...With Spark's help I have now secured a grant of £2,000 for the charity. This means we can now afford to run not one but 2 monthly groups across Mendip and South Somerset, we can afford to buy merchandise to promote ourselves, cover our printing costs and enhance our website. All I can say is a huge thank you to Spark Somerset, I was struggling, and they came to my rescue!"

Pam – Volunteer Fundraiser, Stoma Heroes

"I just wanted to thank you for all your help and support in putting me in touch with your bid writer. Over the last couple of days, I feel like I have learned so much about bid writing and I understand much more about how to get to grips with what the funder is actually asking for and what their priorities are. It's been very beneficial and a pleasure to work with him.

"Not only that, but the work done by yourselves in researching more appropriate funds for us to apply to, really refined the whole bid writing process. Due to the combined help from Spark and your consultant bid writer, we have received a £5,000 donation from one of the funders suggested.

Sonja, Trustee, Rails to Trails

2.3 PARTNERSHIPS

We continue to take a strategic approach to funding in Somerset, seeking opportunities to develop partnerships and support collaborative working. Some highlights are as follows:

Introduction of our new ‘Meet the Funder’ sessions launched with the National Lottery in June 2021. 20 VCSEs from across Somerset coming together for an informal, friendly introduction to the National Lottery with an extended Q&A session with the aim to encourage relationship building. The next session is with the Clark’s Foundation in October.

Worked with the two NHS Trusts to co-produce a proposal to NHS Charities Together (Captain Tom money). The first stage of this process is complete, with the final decision due in December. If successful, this will result in more than £250k being made available to fund grassroots projects that support young peoples’ mental health and carers.

Community Resilience Fund. We are working in partnership with numerous organisations on three partnerships bids to this fund. It has just been announced that all three have been successful, with work commencing in the next month. The proposals are as follows:

- Social Enterprise support – with the School for Social Entrepreneurs, Somerset Community Foundation and CCS (£600k+)
- Digital skills for the VCSE – with Cosmic and Deedmob (the social enterprise that host Spark a Change) (£320k+)
- Community development to support routes into employment – with PLUS, Cosmic, SASP and Inspired to Achieve (£570k)

We continue to chair and provide administrative support to the **Open Mental Health Community Grants Fund**. The panel comprises representatives from Somerset Community Foundation, Citizens Advice, Rethink Mental Illness, Age UK Somerset, as well as an ‘expert by experience’ (person with lived experience). During this period, grants totalling £176,997 were awarded to 31 local community groups. Over the coming months, our Development team will also work with Open Mental Health partners to develop the eco-system of VCSE organisations supporting mental health and wellbeing in our communities. Rather than just administering grants, we will be supporting successful projects to become sustainable, grow and share learning from groups in other parts of the County.

3 VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIAL ACTION

Stimulate social action; supporting volunteers and encouraging businesses and individuals to take a greater role in their communities.

In the last six months, we supported the following activity through Spark a Change, Somerset’s digital volunteering platform:

- 261 volunteers recruited
- 62 groups signed up
- 239 volunteering opportunities promoted

Between 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021 there were 12819 unique on-line visitors to Spark a Change, averaging over 2000 per month. The table below shows KPIs by district:

	SWT	MDC	SSDC	SDC	Countywide / Other	Total
No. of volunteers recruited	111	47	77	38	18	261
Number of organisations	12	14	8	5	23	62
No. of opportunities	71	38	67	32	31	239

The numbers above include volunteer applications as at 14/10/21 for the period 1/4/21 to 30/9/21. This means that the numbers may change slightly for example if an applicant withdraws or is unsuccessful.

Group members of Spark a Change identify up to 3 causes their charity / group exists to help with. In the last 6 months the most popular causes undertaken by groups were:

- health & wellbeing;
- family
- community;
- people with disabilities.

By contrast only one group identified being 'faith based' or supporting 'refugees and minorities' as its cause, and two groups identified gender equality. This data means we are continuing to try to reach groups which work with different sections of the community, as one way of increasing awareness and access to a diverse range volunteering opportunities.

3.1 SUPPORT FOR ORGANISATIONS

During this period, the Volunteering Team supported 103 organisations with volunteering enquiries.

	South Somerset	Sedgemoor	SWT	Mendip	Countywide*	total
Number of enquiries	15	15	33	14	26	103

The table above is a record of help given to VCSE groups.

*Countywide includes groups where no district was allocated, and includes help given to national / regional groups providing services in Somerset.

The table below is the breakdown of the types of help requested:

Type of Enquiries	
Using Spark a Change to recruit / manage volunteers	28
Corporate Volunteering (matching employers with voluntary groups)	8
Volunteer management – advice and support on best practice / problem solving help	57
Other	9
Total	103

Our popular Volunteer Coordinators' forums have continued on-line. We arranged two between April and September.

	South Somerset	Sedgemoor	SWT	Mendip	Countywide*	Total
2x Volunteer Coordinator Forums	3	3	8	5	10	33

Case studies:

- **A major employer from Mendip** asked for help to identify a range of volunteer opportunities for its staff team of over 100 to take part in for their annual volunteering day. The Spark team identified a number of local groups, connected them together and (on request) provided guidance to both parties on ways to stay safe.

“The team found the day really inspiring; learning about some of the brilliant community projects that are close to our Quarry kitchen. They were amazed at how such a small amount of their time could make a significant difference to the projects... the team enjoyed spending time together – many had worked

remotely over the prior year – and it was a really great opportunity to reconnect whilst also giving back to our local community”.

Lauri Duncan, Charlie Bighams (Head of People)

- **A VCSE group based in Taunton**, covering the South West asked for advice transitioning service users into volunteering roles. The Spark team provided best practice advice to support this approach.
“I really can't thank you enough as it's area we are working on and it's good to hear our thought processes are correct and we just need to ensure the implementation now.”
- **A social enterprise in Glastonbury** asked for help with volunteer policies – the Spark team shared some of its on-line resources, and had a phone call to talk things through with the volunteer coordinator.
- **A county wide VCSE** is reviewing its existing volunteer policy to cover a wide range of projects, the Spark team gave feedback on a draft, based on our experience and national good practice.
- **A new community group** is taking over a building and plans to open and run a visitor centre in **Cheddar**, to be managed by volunteers. The Spark team provided guidance and advice by phone to talk through their plans - we've offered to keep in touch as the project progresses.
- **A community group in the Minehead area** was concerned at the poor behaviour of one its volunteers and sought urgent advice on how to end the relationship fairly. The Spark team responded quickly to give our best understanding of the legal framework affecting volunteering and some practical steps for the group to move forward.

3.2 PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT

We have also worked in partnership - offering help and expertise for volunteer management alongside a number of public sector partners:

- Advised and worked with Somerset West and Taunton Council to review their policy for volunteering in order to create capacity at local employment advice hubs
- Gave help to SCC to find local VCSE groups to host service teams' volunteering days (ongoing) – see update on Corporate Volunteering
- Provided advice and practical support to Somerset Foundation Trust and other vaccination providers for involving volunteer stewards – see update on Vaccination Programme
- Supported SCC and Somerset Rivers Authority to plan the Somerset Prepared conference programme (October 2021)
- Supported the Armed Forces Covenant day at RNAS Yeovilton, led by SCC.
- Taking part in discussions with SCC – Civil Contingencies Unit to revise policy for Spontaneous Volunteering, and with Somerset CCG to consider VCSE / volunteer involvement in coping with demand pressures.
- Helping to develop a strategic approach to volunteering within the Integrated Care System – (see update on Somerset Integrated Volunteering Steering Group)
- Working with the South West Museums Development Service to support the Somerset community museums network, with a focus on digital skills and remote volunteering opportunities for volunteers

3.3 SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS

Our requests from individuals are mostly for help to find local volunteering opportunities. Most volunteers access our help through Spark a Change, which is designed to be an easy-to-use tool to discover local or cause related opportunities. As noted above there were 12,800 unique visitors to Spark a Change in the first six months of 2021-22.

In addition, we provided in-depth support as follows:

	South Somerset	Sedgemoor	SWT	Mendip	Countywide*	District not allocated	Total
Enquiries from Individuals	7	1	0	2	3	8	27

Between 1st April and 30th September the number of followers of our Facebook group 'Volunteers in Somerset' grew by 148 to a total of 861.

Around 20% of visitors to Spark a Change come through Facebook.

During Mental Health Awareness Week we shared the story of Alex, a volunteer for whom volunteering at local land-based charity, ARK at Egwood had significantly improved his mental wellbeing. His blog had 198 hits during May.

3.4 SPECIAL PROJECTS

Increasing the take up of Trustee roles

We have identified that trustee roles are particularly difficult to recruit. Over the past few months we have talked to new and existing trustees to better understand their perspective. We planned two training events for the Autumn – one for new trustees and one for groups seeking to recruit. We have been putting together some communications to use during Trustee week in November.

Employer supported volunteering

Over the past 6 months Spark Somerset has seen an increase in employers approaching the organisation to help them arrange group volunteering days for their employees. This tends to be for wellbeing reasons – and a preference for the outdoors. Since April, we have helped secured group volunteering experiences for 129 individuals which has benefited around 6 voluntary sector organisations across Somerset.

Recently we have had 4 further enquiries from other employers in Somerset also wanting to carry out group volunteering days for their employees which we aim to arrange over the coming 6 months.

Siobhan Kelly, Harmony Fires' Events Coordinator explains why they chose corporate volunteering as a team building activity:

"We wanted to carry out a volunteering day as it fitted perfectly with our charitable foundations' ethos of supporting social and local communities and providing young people with opportunities. Helping at ARK seemed the perfect way of combining a team building day with doing good in the local community".

Nigel Bell, Director of ARK at Egwood explains:

"Having volunteer days like this is a massive help to us here at ARK. A job like this for one of our team would take over a week, so to get this done in a day is fantastic!"

Somerset Integrated Volunteering Group

The steering group exists to help develop and deliver the longer term vision for volunteering and social action in the Somerset system. Members are drawn from the public and voluntary sector, the latter being some of the larger health and wellbeing related charities in Somerset using large numbers of volunteers.

The group is convened by Spark Somerset – related activity during the past six months includes:-

- A review / evaluation of the NHS Volunteer Responders scheme, contributing to the national evaluation led by NHS England
- Drafting a set of principles for change / development of volunteering
- 2 webinars and a presentation to the Somerset ICS People Board to better share and understand the challenges and opportunities for volunteering within the future ICS
- Sharing insight from around the system, and getting to know each other more.

Open Mental Health – volunteering support

Spark Somerset manages a contract with Rethink as part of the Somerset VCSE Alliance, focussed on volunteering infrastructure. We network volunteer coordinators together to share and develop a more unified approach – simpler to navigate and easier to access. We also provide support to people seeking volunteering as part their own recovery journey by connecting them to a Volunteer Buddy.

Covid Champions and Vaccination Buddies

Spark Somerset was commissioned by the Public Health team to develop a network of Covid Champions and Vaccination buddies to offer objective and accurate information to the community to help take steps to prevent infection and to help reduce hesitancy for the Covid vaccine.

To date we have recruited 15 buddies (speaking a range of languages) and handled 30 referrals from health professionals. A network of over 100 Covid Champions (although activity is reducing over time has been widely acknowledged for its contribution in engaging with communities.

“Being a Covid Community Champion has been so beneficial, I've been able to reassure friends and family regarding the vaccine programme, offer advice to those unsure about PPE and signpost those wanting more information.

“Its been really nice knowing I am helping people through the Covid crisis so thank you for this.”

Somerset Covid Champion 2021

Somerset Vaccination Programme

Spark has continued to provide support to vaccination centres by helping to recruit volunteer stewards to help with parking, a welcome and directions. To date (since December 2020) we have attracted over 1500 volunteers to help with the programme. Volunteers are directly managed by individual sites, and we provide guidance and support to create safe and positive ways of working as integrated staff & volunteer teams.

Somerset Carers Service – supporting community groups to support unpaid carers

Spark Somerset holds a sub-contract from the Community Council for Somerset to deliver part of the Somerset Carers Service – supporting volunteer led support groups across Somerset. The majority of groups were forced to close during the last 18 months although this is now changing and we have built up a picture of 24 pre-Covid, current or potential groups at Bridgwater, Burnham, Langport, Martock, Somerton, Keinton Mandeville, Chard, Ilminster, Wincanton, Castle Cary, Bruton, Crewkerne, South Petherton, Yeovil, Wells, Street, Cheddar, Frome, Wellington, Taunton (Wellspring), Williton, Bishops Lydford, Dulverton, and Minehead. 14 groups are open already or soon to be.

Volunteers' Week

During Volunteers' week (1-5 June) we shared a series of volunteer stories to raise awareness of the range of volunteering opportunities available for individuals and groups of employees in Somerset and inspire people to get involved.

- On Twitter we earned 16.7k impressions and averaged at 2.4k per day (average per day for reporting period is 1k per day)
- On Facebook our average post reach for the period is 2686* (compared to 781 for reporting period)
- *The Spark iT intro post shared on 1 June to coincide with start of Volunteers Week reached 13,224 people
- The blog posts themselves received 480 hits during the month of June. The story of Alex, a volunteer talking about how volunteering at Ark at Egwood has improved his mental health was the most popular at 158 views.
- The posts on Instagram reached a total of 687 accounts.
- Total number of volunteer sign ups during the week were 36.

4 VOICE, INFLUENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Improve and support communication and collaboration within and between sectors; strengthen the voice and influence of the sector to shape and design policy and delivery; act as independent advocate for Somerset's VCSE sector

4.1 STRATEGIC REPRESENTATION

As public sector services across the country reach out to the VCSE sector through formal health and care strategies, the range, speed and scale of collaboration is increasing – and Somerset already has a firm foundation on which to collaborate further. However, it is crucial that the VCSE sector has a strong voice to share concerns, is able to contribute strategically as equal partners, and is funded adequately to do so. The first 6 months of this reporting period have been extremely busy and challenging, mainly due to the shifting environment we find ourselves in – namely Local Government Reorganisation and the Integrated Care System. Both of these processes present huge opportunities for the VCSE, but also challenges. As a result, we have been working hard to ensure that the voice of our sector is heard and that VCSE organisations are embedded in the development stages.

Regional/National

- NHS Responders
- SEVAG/AAVAG
- SW LRF (Local Resilience Forum)

Countywide:

- ICS lead for the VCSE
- Local Government Reorganisation Advisory Board
- People Board for Health and Social Care
- Enhanced Occupational Health and Wellbeing Task & Finish Group
- Collaboration Forum (Systems leads from across the ICS)
- Community Resilience Partnerships Group
- Chair of Open Mental Health
- Mental Health and Learning Disability Strategic Cell
- The Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Strategic Cell
- Chair of Open Mental Health Grants Panel
- Multi-agency Recovery Cell
- Homelessness Reduction Board
- Local Nature Partnership
- Somerset Community Foundation Grants Panel
- Provider Development Committee (NHS Trusts)
- Social Prescribing Framework group
- Community Hospitals Strategy Group

District-wide:

- VCSE rep on numerous PCN Boards
- Wellington One partnership
- Mendip Health and Wellbeing Forum
- Mendip Comic Relief Grants Panel
- South Somerset Care Board
- Yeovil Connect

We also support the coordination of the following:

- Somerset Youth Work Alliance
- Somerset Group of Charities
- Integrated Volunteering Steering Group
- Chard Connect
- Bridgwater Connect
- Taunton Connect

Key highlights of this work include:

Integrated Care System (ICS) – Spark is the VCSE representative for the development of the new ICS (where health and the local authority will be co-commissioning health and care services). The ICS design framework makes clear references to involving the VCSE in the strategy for supporting our communities. Therefore, it is imperative that the VCSE and wider community are involved in coproduction throughout this process, so that we can ensure a balance of power and build capacity within our communities in a sustainable way. Spark have been involved in initial conversations, including participating in the

engagement panels for recruitment of the ICS Chair and CEO. We will be clarifying involvement of the VCSE over the coming months to ensure that the wider sector is suitably informed and involved.

Local Government Reorganisation – Spark are representing the VCSE on the Advisory Board for this transformational work, that will see Somerset move to a unitary authority. We ran a workshop on the VCSE at a recent conference for Town and Parish Councils and will continue to work with partners to ensure that the VCSE is integrated into the new model. In particular, we are keen to influence and support the development of the Local Community Networks.

VCSE Participation Fund - For partnership working with statutory partners to flourish, funding models and timescales need to reflect the time taken to collaborate and the capacity required to do so effectively. To this end, we developed a proposal for the CCG (in partnership with key stakeholders from Somerset Group of Charities, NHS and the County Council) to establish a Participation Fund so that more VCSE organisations can actively participate in stakeholder meetings. By contributing to staff costs and any related travel expenses, this demonstrates that the time of VCSE organisations is valued – and that VCSE does not mean free. Funding has now been agreed, with Spark Somerset acting as a coordination point for this work.

4.2 CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT

We consult with the sector through our daily work and use these conversations to shape and adapt our services. Our team, based in the community, gather intelligence face to face and via our forums and events. We also engage significantly through online means and social media is a key communications tool for our charity. We continue to see our followers increase significantly. We use our social media channels to promote events, disseminate information and updates, consult with the sector and share good news.

Socials:

- Facebook
 - Total page likes are now 1689 (116 increase over period)
 - Total likes are now 1616, (110 over period)
 - Average organic page reach for the period is 781
- Twitter
 - 95.4k impressions for the period (average 1k per day)
 - Current followers 2415, 168 new followers over the period
- Instagram
 - 601 followers
- LinkedIn
 - 155 followers

Key activity during this period includes:

Somerset Community Hospital Strategy

We have been working with Somerset Foundation Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Group since early 2021 to support engagement around the vision for community hospitals in Somerset. We have been able to bring our knowledge of the VCSE sector into the design process for the engagement and ensured that community partners have been a part of the conversation.

Reflect, Recover, Renew

During this period, our consultation work focussed on this research project which aims to identify the strengths of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in Somerset and understand what it needs to thrive in the future. We are supported by a steering group comprising Somerset County Council, Somerset Association of Local Councils, Somerset Community Foundation, Frome Town Council, Community Council for Somerset, Diversity Voice and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership.



Throughout the process, led by an independent academic researcher, we brought together a diverse range of voluntary and community organisations from across the county to develop a shared vision. The process consisted of:

- A survey (150 participants)
- 13 focus groups (including themed sessions with anchor organisations; equality, diversity and inclusion, etc.)
- 24 interviews with VCSE leaders
- 2 visioning sessions, attended by VCSE leaders and key stakeholders

“I thought that the recent Spark visioning session was very well done and really demonstrated the work you are all doing to look at how Spark moves forward and the potential for the voluntary sector to make changes in how we work together and communicate with each other.”

Patricia Roche, Headway Somerset

The findings of this work and a co-produced ‘roadmap’ for the VCSE will be published in late-November.

5 SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PRESCRIBING ACTIVITY

Support and develop formal and informal volunteering opportunities; communication of health and care-related topics; develop and maintain networks with VCSE groups and other stakeholders involved in social prescribing

The KPIs for this element are mainly covered earlier in the report i.e. supporting the VCSE and enabling social action. The majority of our work enables VCSE activity, which in turn creates a thriving eco-system for social prescribing activity – as reflected in most of the case studies and testimonials provided throughout.

However, we thought it was useful to provide some additional specific examples:

- We have developed a proposal for a Carer Aware benchmark programme for GP surgeries to support carers – based on Carer Support Wiltshire’s Investors in Carers GP accreditation scheme. This has been broadly adopted by SCC commissioners and the CCG and will be taken forward by CCS.
- Supported a small group of local organisations & the GP surgery health coaches & Alzheimer’s Society support worker to enable Queen Camel to become a Dementia Friendly Community. Plans in-hand to offer 1-hour Dementia Friendly training to local people as well as finding three Safe Places for people with dementia and setting up a Memory Cafe.
- Setting up a programme to support people with long-term chronic pain conditions, enabling them to find a range of non-medical ways of managing pain – developing a small multi-agency working group to create a tailored programme for the PCN.
- Supported a mindfulness organisation in Somerset West and Taunton to gain funding to deliver courses to adults suffering with poor mental health.

5.1 THRIVING COMMUNITIES SOMERSET

Although not funded by this contract, we are also working in partnership with health, art and nature organisations to run this funded project, designed to support the social prescribing agenda. The project aims to develop a programme of activities aimed at individuals with long-term conditions, unskilled young-people, care home staff and those with long-covid. Seven activities have been identified including dance, singing, creating raised beds and word play.

We have established networks with local, regional and national projects and four roadshow events to promote social prescribing will be held across the county from November onwards.

5.2 WELLBEING DIRECTORIES

We continue to host and manage two online directories that provide useful information about community-based social prescribing activities. Undoubtedly, Covid has had an impact on these resources, not least because many of the activities promoted on the directories have had to cease. Despite this, usage has remained steady and we envisage this increasing as we emerge from the pandemic and activities re-start.

Wellbeing Sedgemoor

- **Website** had 798 users and 4402 page views. Top 3 pages were:
 - Directory
 - Mental health Support
 - Community and Talking Cafes.
- **Facebook** (published in June)
 - 93 followers
 - Total likes are now 85 (42 over period)
 - Average organic page reach for the period is 65
- **Twitter** (Profile created in July)
 - Current followers 72
 - 13.4k impressions (average 147 per day)

Wellbeing South Somerset

- **Website** had 4213 users and 10905 page views. Top 3 pages were:
 - Directory
 - Older people
 - Mental health
- **Facebook**
 - Total page followers are 517 (65 increase over period)
 - Total likes are now 492 (60 over period)
 - Average organic page reach for the period is 280
- **Twitter**
 - Current followers 750, 40 new followers over the period
 - 11.1k impressions for the period (average 122 per day)

6 APPENDIX – ADDITIONAL TESTIMONIALS & CASE STUDIES

6.1 MENDIP

- Success in linking St Edmunds Hall, Glastonbury with ENGIE (Sanctuary Housing) in order to facilitate discussions re-grading support for their growing project.
- Working with The Good Heart Frome to provide advice in many areas; *“over the course of five months we received skilled professional support in identifying next steps, an appropriate organizational structure, and how to upgrade our website.”*
- Worked with Wells skateboard park to help them identify funding sources and gave advice on their applications.
- *“Spark’s support has been invaluable in our quest to raise a substantial amount of money to build a new Village Hall in Meare They are professional, efficient and always willing to help wherever they can, they will always be our first point of contact in our future fundraising efforts.”* Alan, Trustee, Meare and Westhay Village Hall

Case Study – Mendip Disability Forum

I spoke with Carole from the Mendip Disability Forum as they were struggling to fill the committee roles for the forum. I attended a committee meeting and was able to provide advice and support regarding the best way forward. I was able to support them in their calls with the National Lottery regarding their funding and also helped them with looking at alternative options and ways forward which would reach more people with a disability in a more effective way.

6.2 SOUTH SOMERSET

- Yeovil Men’s Shed: Visited to support now they have reopened and have a new committee in place to support the new Chairman. Supplied with Safeguarding Policy pro forma, involved with dementia project, reconnected with Westfield Community Garden and attending Meet the Funder. *“Thank you for all the help you are giving us.”*
- Well Be Hub, a new CIC delivering Mental Health Training: This new community interest company wanted to make connections in the area and offer free spaces on courses to volunteers in community groups in the area. We linked them with Active Learning and Skills (Chard based) and also offered spaces to In The Mix Project (SWT) and The Space Project (Mendip).
- Helped St Michael’s Yeovil get a grant of £1500 to start a simple garden planting project at Birchfield Rec. *“I received an email today offering me the complete £1500. That was the best news of this week. I am very grateful for your help in finding this funder! It would not have happened without your help.”*

Case study - Chard Connect

I approached an attendee of Chard Connect who had been heavily involved with the COVID 19 support group and during COVID has gone on to set up a ‘meals on wheels’ delivery type service with a friend who does the cooking, based out of south Chard Church. This small business has become an invaluable service for some of the more vulnerable and elderly members of the community in Chard, because the owner provides a personal delivery service and phone calls; she is also very well connected and makes referrals to the One Team, to healthcare providers and liaises with the CCS village agent about specific mental/physical health needs of her clients.

She had left her full-time job pre-pandemic due to mental health issues and done some peer support work with Chard Watch. I met with her to discuss funding opportunities she could access, and helped her to write a bid for the Open Mental Health Grants, which was successful (end of August/September). The money will allow this excellent community service to continue and support people with moderate or severe mental health issues, combined with isolation and other vulnerabilities, in Chard.

6.3 SEDGEMOOR

- Following our help, Bridgwater Area Cycling Campaign were successful in their application to Somerset Community Foundation and are now starting to recruit a staff member.
- Supported Rusty Road 2 Recovery to expand means that local people with mental health problems are able to continue to go there, where they will always get a warm welcome and support.
- The Hamp community engagement team were looking to expand on ways to engage ASB youth and their families. I connect them to the Bridgwater Area Community Sports Trust who run a 6-week summer football camp. And since then we have looked at more long-term courses to keep engaged with the targeted youth.

Case Study – Active Living Group

We have been offering regular online forums for ALG members encouraging them to collaborate and return to meeting post Covid. We are now planning some in person meetings.

Maggie Harrison from Nether Stowey ALG joined the ALG Forum. She talked with the 2 other ALGs present about how they were planning to open up, and practical steps they could take to reassure members and volunteers.

“I found the meeting last week very helpful in thinking about how we start back with our Wednesday Club and following that we had a very productive Committee Meeting the next day, so we are all set to restart the Coffee Mornings as before lockdown, with a view to starting back full time in September.... Once again many thanks for your support of the Active Living Groups.”

6.4 SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON

- We supported Oake Friendship club to receive funding to ensure the club can continue.
- We started a Duke of Edinburgh initiative, linking local schools/colleges and VCSE groups which is developing well.
- We facilitated meetings between the food pantry manager and the owner and service manager of *My Day*, a service for adults with additional needs. A group of adults is now on the rota to support the Food Pantry regularly.

Case Study – Bicknoller Village Playing Fields

We have been supporting Bicknoller Village playing fields to look at their governance structure and support them in changing it from a constitution dating from 1949. They are looking to become a CIO but also have some land in trust which they want to ensure is appropriately transferred. They had been given some information which had led them to believe they are not operating properly and I have been able to seek some advice for them and talk them through its implications. I have been taking them through the steps they need to take in winding up their current organisation, transferring their assets and starting the new organisation, including signposting them towards further guidance and advice where required. This is due to be discussed at their upcoming AGM with an application to be made to the charity commission shortly.