

## Summary of Progress – 2021/22

### **Involve:**

Involve Kent and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council have an established partnership in place through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) worth £3600 a year with the aim of promoting and supporting volunteering across the Malling Borough. Similarly, to 2020, this year saw further restrictions being enforced by the government and a general fear around COVID transmission that impacted on our work and development with volunteering projects and engagement within the community. Following the impact of last year, we were able to identify positives and engage with volunteers in a completely new way. Like many other organisations, digital and remote connectivity was paramount in our volunteering work and enabled us to include individuals that would not usually choose to volunteer. This report explores how Involve Kent worked with and supported volunteers from the Tonbridge and Malling area across the year 2021.

### **Reporting on the specifics in the SLA for 2021;**

We have 126 volunteers from the district currently participating in involve roles or activities

Volunteers are currently in the following roles:

Exercise group (virtual) volunteer

Volunteers supporting people with a cancer diagnosis

Older people's befrienders

Volunteer Drivers supporting the community

'Get Involved' volunteers taking part in gardening and DIY

Members accessing creative activities including knitting, sewing and craft

6 T&M Volunteers have completed 'Response' training courses

Volunteer Drivers supporting the community

### **Involve Cancer support volunteering in depth**

In August this year, our Cancer Support Coordinator resigned and through the dedicated cancer support volunteers we were able to continue running the service whilst recruiting with no negative impact on clients. This was considered a huge success and allowed us to reflect on the service to identify development needs. Through this period were able to expand the cancer support service to include several conditions, not just cancer, and rebranded the service as our Life Changing Conditions service. We currently have Volunteers from the Tonbridge and Malling area providing vital support clients affected by a life changing condition. These volunteers have supported a total of 57 clients, providing tailored emotional and practical support such as, coffee mornings, 1:1 meetings, exercise groups and enabling access to free transport to and from hospital appointments. 15 of these clients were from the Tonbridge and Malling area.

Our volunteers have also remained flexible to needs throughout the pandemic by adapting to digital ways of communication, for example, weekly telephone calls, Zoom check ins and online exercise classes.

### **Matching volunteers to opportunities within volunteer involving organisations**

We continued to support 34 organisations working or based in Tonbridge and Malling by promoting widely to our Social Prescribers and Community Navigators, who support individuals into volunteering. We keep a database of organisations internally which can be referred to by staff in signposting/navigation roles and use this to match volunteers to suitable organisations.

In addition, we work with several community partners across Tonbridge and Malling and share information about their volunteering opportunities with our clients who are aged 55 and over, or under 55 with complex health/support needs.

Following 2020, many volunteer roles were still limited due to organisations working remotely, however there were still opportunities available around practical support such as driving, volunteering at food banks and offering befriending.

As well as local volunteer opportunities, we continued to engage with national initiatives including the NHS Responders programme.

### **Providing support for individual volunteers, particularly those facing barriers to volunteering e.g. through age, disability, culture, income etc.**

As part of our Get Involved volunteering programme, volunteers are offered specialist support by our Wellbeing and Inclusion Lead who works with volunteers individually as well as in a group to encourage volunteers to engage with their goals. When starting the programme, our volunteers and Wellbeing and Inclusion Lead will work together to build an individual development plan which identifies areas that volunteers would like to improve or change.

As part of our mission to develop resilient communities, we undertook a wide research project this year with our supported volunteers to understand their needs and what activities would work best for them. One of the outcomes of this consultation work was that our supported volunteers wanted to know more about the outdoors and after their experience of the lockdowns, felt more comfortable being outdoors. Therefore, in November this year, we were able to offer our first outdoor volunteering programme that teaches volunteers about forestry, cooking and foraging all whilst they help maintaining a local scout camp forest.

Every effort is made to ensure our supported volunteering opportunities remain accessible, including working with other organisations and professionals to boost knowledge of the projects and support to the volunteer. We also provide transport to supported volunteers as well as signposting to appropriate services and resources.

### **Involve Supported Volunteering in depth**

Our Supported Volunteering programme offers individuals who are socially excluded an opportunity to engage in meaningful work alongside others who share similar experiences.

The beginning of this year saw the start of the third national lockdown, continuing to put pressure on our already isolated supported volunteers. We remained a strong

support to our volunteers through check in calls and online catch up's as well as extending our range of virtual social opportunities. This included an online craft-along group where we sent out materials to volunteers at home and hosted a digital meeting, therefore still being able to provide a sense of togetherness and project collaboration even though participants were physically apart. Across the year we were able to support 11 volunteers from the Tonbridge and Malling Area, +2 volunteers on last year, through a range of different support projects. As we moved into the summer months and restrictions eased, we were able to open up our outdoor groups including our Get Involved Project and allotment. 8 Tonbridge and Malling volunteers accessed these projects, completing 115 gardening jobs across the year.

Volunteers told us they were keen to be outdoors and as a result of this feedback we introduced our outdoor winter group, "Grow Well", to continue supporting volunteers even in the colder months. Our Grow well project supports Volunteers from the Malling area, providing not only social support but enables volunteers to learn about the outdoors through guided forestry walks, planting, foraging, and cooking classes.

### **Promoting, stimulating and encouraging local interest in volunteering and community activity**

We promoted volunteering through our social media channels and newsletter, promoting volunteering-involving organisations roles alongside Involve opportunities. We continue to hold information on volunteer-involving organisations so that staff can refer clients into appropriate volunteer roles.

As well as volunteering, we also refer clients over 55 or under 55 with complex health/support needs into community activities, which include everything from beekeeping, growing food for food parcels, social groups, walking groups, line dancing and much more. Often when taking part in organised community groups, the client becomes more confident and in turn becomes a lead volunteer for the group, helping others to enjoy the benefits

### **Involve Befriending Volunteering in depth**

As part of our ongoing Covid 19 response and support to those isolating with covid and self-isolating as a precaution Volunteers from the Malling area worked to call people who were lonely and/or isolating. The Volunteers worked to support people across T & M with 787 calls being made to people who were in the ME16, ME18, ME19 and ME20 postcodes

### **Promoting existing volunteer driver schemes within the area**

Over the last year, our volunteer drivers have continued to provide essential transport and trips to 58 Tonbridge and Malling clients, totalling 371 trips. Throughout the lockdown, volunteers delivered a pickup and drop off shopping and prescriptions service to those most vulnerable, free of charge.

Volunteers also adapted to the pandemic by altering their vehicles such as putting in screens and wore masks to ensure that vulnerable clients could still access

important medical appointments. By being connected with Involve Kent, volunteer drivers were able to work alongside other teams including the vaccine helpline staff and given access to a variety of support and information.

Involve Kent continue to promote volunteer driving and despite many of our volunteers having to isolate or shield across the period, 6 volunteer drivers from the Tonbridge and Malling area delivered a total of 741 trips.

Over the last year Involve has strengthened connections with other voluntary organisations such as Rotary clubs to share the benefits of volunteering for both the volunteer and the community.

As the Involve transport service grows, so does the opportunities for those in the community wishing to give back through driving. We continue to run recruitment campaigns for more volunteer drivers across our social media platforms.

### **Promoting good practice within organisations involving volunteers by providing support and information.**

We continue to distribute information in our weekly newsletter, which has 1638 subscribers.

In the reporting period, there were 4 networking events for the Voluntary & Community Sector, with topics discussed including 'covid safety' and 'Integrated Care Partnerships', the latter bringing together the voluntary sector with health.

Attendance was high in 2021 largely due to the accessibility of hosting the events online. Networking meetings were attended by local organisations including Communing, Angel Lane CIC and Compassionate Neighbours.

We held a special event in July to focus specifically on volunteering, attended by 25 organisations. This event included two breakout rooms where organisations could share best practice and learning. One room was themed around roles and opportunities created during the pandemic, the second was led by our Marketing Officer and focussed on promotion of volunteer roles.

As well as these events we also hold three other quarterly forums: Health, Wellbeing & Disability network, Children & Young People's network and a Multicultural network. Each network gives organisations opportunity to focus on particular topics of interest. In addition, there is a bi-monthly Service Provider Network Meeting for those working in the area of mental health. All networks allow for organisations to make new contacts, share best practice and give information to others.

In 2021, 187 organisations attended 16 events organised by Involve. Our Information Officer maps all organisations across Tonbridge & Malling and ensures that their current information is available for free online on our platform Connect Well. This platform is accessed by thousands of people each year, both individuals and professionals.

## **Liaising with local organisations, including parish councils and other voluntary groups to promote services**

Contact is maintained through regular newsletters promoting volunteering and other community initiatives.

Our Engagement Officer is active in the community and regularly visits organisations to help promote their opportunities and offer support and guidance around engagement. They also have mapped a large number of community resources including parish magazines and newspapers, and will use these resources to promote volunteering, community activities and other organisations.

Volunteer opportunities are advertised in GP practices across all of Tonbridge and Malling and social prescribers recruit volunteers to run social/community groups as well as to 'buddy up' with less confident patients so that they can attend events or groups.

## **Providing information through the Involve Kent website and online directory**

The website is regularly updated alongside the Connect Well directory, [www.connectwellwestkent.org.uk](http://www.connectwellwestkent.org.uk) Volunteer opportunities are advertised on Do-it.org and kentvolunteers.org.uk. Social media is a key communication tool with 6002 (almost double last year's number) 'followers' and frequent updates.

## **Participating in local, regional and national campaigns, either individually or in partnership with other providers**

National campaigns we have participated in include Volunteers Week, World Mental Health Day, Carers Week, Carers Rights Day.

## **Providing input into strategic development of volunteering locally, regionally and nationally**

Involve are in conversations to work with Ashford Volunteer Centre on a piece of work that will see a more robust approach to volunteer brokerage across all of Kent. This will provide infrastructure for digital brokerage as well as special events for voluntary sector organisations including training and networking.

We continue to refer organisations to Stronger Kent Communities for tailored support and accreditation via the REVAMP quality mark.

## **Carrying out DBS checks on all volunteers working in Involve Kent, who work with vulnerable adults**

All volunteers and staff working with vulnerable adults are DBS checked and a DBS check service is offered across the Malling area, enabling local groups to check their staff and volunteers.

## **Acting as an umbrella body for DBS checks for all Voluntary Organisations**

We continue to act as umbrella body for DBS checks and promote the service widely.

## Imago:

We have provided a volunteer recruitment service and a volunteer driving service that has benefited individuals and organisations in Tonbridge and Malling.

- We have NCVO Accredited Volunteer Centre status
- We promote volunteering. We liaise with voluntary and community groups and include their volunteering opportunities in our West Kent Volunteer Centre newsletters. In 2021 we significantly increased the number of Volunteer Centre newsletters produced. Whereas in 2020 they were quarterly due to a number of organisations pausing services as a result of the pandemic, in 2021 we produced 8 in February, April, June, July, September, October, November and December. We are now committed to producing these monthly. There are 354 individuals on the newsletter distribution list (from across West Kent).
- We also significantly increased our social media presence for the Volunteer Centre. After every edition of the newsletter was distributed we would post daily opportunities on Facebook and Twitter often featuring the vacancies that appeared in the newsletter. This is also a useful way of promoting those opportunities that have a short turnaround time and would have been out of date by the time the next newsletter was distributed. These tend to be for events and for seasonal opportunities.
- We continue to receive volunteering enquiries from local residents and we direct them to <https://doit.life>, the Kent Volunteers digital volunteering matching database, our latest Volunteer Centre newsletter or provide them with tailored advice about local volunteering opportunities. In the early part of 2021 we received enquiries from people interested in helping at vaccination centres. We are able to help with very specific enquiries e.g. someone got in touch because her brother was moving to Tonbridge and was looking for a volunteer gardener job to get experience for future employment.
- Good practice development - We facilitate a Volunteer Coordinators Forum and pre-Covid we would have physical meetings of this group. In 2021 we had 3 online meetings and this has proved to be an interesting development as the attendance profile has changed. While some of the regular attendees still attend we have been able to accommodate Coordinators, including a few in London, who are not based in West Kent but who manage volunteers in this area. The Forum is useful for accessing peer support and feedback is particularly good from new Volunteer Coordinators who are able to get advice from those with more experience. Often organisations only have one Volunteer Coordinator and it can be difficult for them to get relevant advice from within their own organisations.
- We have continued to operate our Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checking service for organisations.
- Our Dial 2 Drive Community Transport service has 15 registered drivers in the Tonbridge and Malling area serving 130 clients. The service continued throughout 2021, despite Covid. This included drives to vaccination appointments which were offered free of charge to clients and some non-clients and this was funded by Imago. Several drivers who had decided to step away in 2020 because of the pandemic and underlying health issues returned to us

in 2021. We also continued to offer befriending calls to clients who were apprehensive about using the service.

In addition:

- We have provided direct one-to-one support to voluntary and community organisations that deliver services in Tonbridge and Malling including Weald Gymnastics Centre, Compaid, West Kent Mediation, St John's Church in Hildenborough, Home-Start South West Kent, Citizens Advice North and West Kent, Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, Tree of Hope and DAVSS.
- Our Community Development Coordinator is a member of the Linda Hogan Community Fund panel that offers grants that Tonbridge and Malling based organisations can apply for.
- We produce monthly newsletters with sector information for local organisations. Our Imago newsletter is distributed to voluntary and public sector organisations, some of whom are Tonbridge based.
- We represent the voluntary sector on strategic partnerships including the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership and then disseminate useful information to the sector.
- We provided information to 5 thematic groups – the West Kent Young People's Provider Forum, the West Kent Older Peoples Provider Forum, the Community Groups Network, the Disabled and Sensory Impaired Network and the Volunteer Coordinators Forum.

New for 2022

We will be offering a fortnightly drop in session in Tonbridge for those people who would like to volunteer but whose needs cannot be met via online volunteering matching databases. These are people who need additional help to find an opportunity that they would be interested in and suitable for. This will begin when a location has been identified.

## Mediation Schemes:

These are the combined number of referrals to both mediation services from March 2020 to date. 20/1/2022. Please note that to enable business continuity both services have been operating their services remotely and offering mediation and Anger management course on line, via zoom, whatsapp etc. Both organisations have done their best in trying to keep their service running during the Pandemic thus ensuring that we have been available to those that have needed us.

3 schools in the borough have had children trained in Peer mediation skills

- Neighbour/community cases 10
- family cases 13
- Anger Management courses.( MMS) 9
- preventing Homelessness 1

- Restorative justice process 1
- Even during the Pandemic Maidstone Mediation have trained 1 cohort of new volunteers, 16 new volunteers. They are trained in mediation skills to deliver neighbourhood mediation, family mediation to address the issues that arise in the home, preventing our clients from being made homeless, sofa surfing and presenting at TMBC as homeless.
- We have also worked with families when there has been Adolescent to Parent violence and the threat of homelessness, residents/ parents ask for our support and help to try to prevent their children entering into the criminal justice system. We are also able to offer Anger Management courses to any resident from the age of 12 through to adults

All of our work takes away some of the burden off the statutory agencies; preventing, responding and resolving the common issues in the community. Statutory agencies are working at crisis levels; Police, Housing providers, the Council and Early Help preventative services. If the two mediation services did not exist, the burden on those agencies would increase exponentially.

We are able to offer a free service to those in the borough who most need it, both services have the Restorative Justice Quality mark for 'best practice' staff and volunteers have trained and achieved the certificate of competence in KCC E-learning safeguarding and have 'enhanced' DBS certificates.

The Mediation services regularly attend the TMBC meetings, e.g. the TMBC CSVG, The TMBC DA forum, and Strategy group meetings. We attend any training that is offered to us e.g. Prevent training and this year already we have delivered training to TMBC staff. We constantly remind agencies, the police and the CSP of the referral process and about our service.

Kim Salisbury

Manager

Maidstone Mediation Scheme.