



## **Involve Kent - Report to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council 2022**

### **Introduction**

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.

With Covid restrictions lifted, we have been able to focus on promoting volunteering roles that are based in the community and have recruited volunteers into more face-to-face roles than in 2021. This year across the sector there has been lower volunteer numbers than usual due in part to the current cost of living crisis, many volunteers reported that they need to take on paid roles or need to provide childcare for their grandchildren and can no longer afford the time to continue in volunteer roles. To countenance this we have worked on a Kent and Medway wide Volunteer project led by Volunteer Centre Ashford and have run volunteer recruitment campaigns in the area supported by Pfizer. We have seen an increase in local volunteering in the later part of this period as a result of this work.

This report explores how Involve Kent worked with and supported volunteers from the Tonbridge and Malling area across the year 2022.

### **Reporting on the specifics in the SLA for 2022:**

We have 102 volunteers from the Borough currently participating in Involve roles or activities including,

- Exercise groups volunteers
- Falls prevention class volunteers
- Telephone befriending
- Volunteer Drivers providing low cost transport
- Volunteer gardeners
- Buddying
- Administration
- Members accessing creative activities including knitting, sewing and craft

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

We continued to support VCS 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.

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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.

We have 8 voluntary sector partners in Tonbridge and Malling funded by Involve under the KCC Universal Wellbeing contract; all provide a extensive volunteering opportunities and together they estimate to have over 800 volunteers, including supported volunteers. We provide all partners with specialist support from CAP Enterprise, who assist with policies, capacity building and funding applications.

Volunteer roles include:

- Telephone befriending
- Horticulture and allotment volunteering
- Supporting wellbeing activities for the over 55's such as singing groups and seated exercise classes
- Backstage theatre volunteers including set design and building, props, gardening, costumes
- Conservation and nature based volunteering
- Supporting social activities; coffee mornings, craft groups, lunch clubs, games groups and day trips
- Supporting the wider community through signposting, foodbanks, clothes swaps, toddler groups and youth work

We are working to address the national volunteer shortfall through involvement in Kent wide initiatives with other volunteer centres and are working on a Kent volunteer campaign, supported by Pfizer.

### **Volunteers supporting Involve Falls Prevention Classes**

Volunteers at our falls prevention classes in the Borough play a significant part in the delivery and success of the 36 week programmes for people who are at risk of falling or who have experienced a fall. In 2022 we ran programmes in Tonbridge and Hadlow with each class supported by 2 volunteers who provide the instructor with help in setting up /clearing down the room, taking the registers, making teas and coffees as well as assisting clients who have high needs during the exercises. Our volunteers have formed strong working relationships with Involve and our Instructors. Most of these volunteers have, or will be, continuing to volunteer in the role as new programmes are added. Furthermore, through reducing the risk of falls and associated social isolation, the volunteer supported programme improves confidence in participants enabling them to get involved in local volunteering opportunities.

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

Our Wellbeing and Inclusion Lead has continued to provide specialist support to volunteers engaged in our 'Get Involved' volunteering programme in 2022. Participants who face barriers to volunteering have been supported to take part in volunteering projects including our weekly allotment and shed groups. In addition this year they have the opportunity to develop new skills in sports-based volunteering in partnership with Kent Sport, including badminton, bowls and table tennis.

The Wellbeing and Inclusion Lead supports participants on a group basis as well as on an individual level when they join the programme. On starting the programme, participants and the Wellbeing and Inclusion Lead work together to build individual development plans to identify areas that they want to improve.

Accessibility to volunteering is at the forefront of our projects and we are always seeking to improve our knowledge through partnerships with other organisations and widen participation in volunteering in communities where levels have been historically low. Transport is provided if needed to access volunteering projects, and if further support is required, we signpost /refer to specialist services.

## **Involve Supported Volunteering in depth**

We have maintained our range of virtual groups, despite the end of lockdown restrictions, for volunteers who have remained cautious of returning to face-to-face volunteering and continue to provide support through telephone and online calls.

Our outdoor supported projects have continued throughout 2022 and have been well attended. The 'Grow Well' project, supporting volunteers in Malling to learn skills in planting, growing, foraging, and cooking also provides social support and the volunteers take part in a range of outdoor activities such as nature walks.

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

Volunteering continues to be widely promoted through our social media channels and weekly newsletter. We regularly post our volunteer opportunities on local Tonbridge and Malling Facebook pages, such as community pages and groups, to connect with more people in the area. We are also advertising directly from our Facebook page, as part of our efforts to promote Involve Kent in the local community.

We continue to signpost and refer clients over 55, or under 55 with complex health/support needs into community activities. The activities may be social groups,

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exercise classes, arts and culture or nature based (anything from art to Zumba gold!). Taking part in such activities can often lead to a client feeling more confident and lead to them becoming further involved with the activity by taking on a volunteer role with the organisation. Communigrow, for example, have reported that 6 of their wellbeing clients in 2022 have now taken up long term volunteering roles there.

We work with organisations such as CXK, running a volunteer swap scheme that operates in Tonbridge and other boroughs. The aim of the scheme is to provide a platform for our volunteers to be redirected to other organisations in the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) that have roles better suited to their skills and interests, while also attracting volunteers to fill high demand roles within our organisation. CXK reciprocates by sending volunteers our way.

To promote the volunteer service, we are distributing leaflets to our existing Tonbridge volunteers and encouraging them to spread the word. We are also placing the leaflets in local shops and cafes, and utilising word of mouth, to reach and recruit members from the Tonbridge and Malling local communities.

We attended 2 events organised by TAMS in 2022 to promote Involve's services for older people. We also used this opportunity to promote and signpost to local volunteering opportunities.

Through our partnership with Kent Volunteers, we strive to provide exceptional support to Kent Volunteers. Our marketing manager has teamed up with the KV to improve their website, with the aim of benefiting all charitable organisations throughout Tonbridge and the rest of Kent. The goal is to make it easier for charities to effectively advertise and promote their volunteer roles, connecting them with passionate and dedicated individuals.

The Involve Kent marketing manager has been instrumental in revamping the website, ensuring it is optimised for search engines, user-friendly, and accessible to a wide audience. By working closely with the Kent Volunteers, we are committed to making a positive impact on the volunteer sector in Kent. We share a common goal of supporting the crucial role that volunteers play in their communities. Together, we aim to create a sustainable, impactful, and efficient platform for volunteers and charitable organisations to connect.

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

Over the last year, our volunteer drivers have continued to provide essential transport and trips in Tonbridge and Malling clients. We have 12 drivers registered from Tonbridge and Malling and have provided affordable transport to 65 clients in the Borough totalling 970 trips.

In 2022, we have continued to develop our links with Rotary Clubs and ARAs, working together to promote the benefits of volunteering, both for the volunteer and wider community.

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We ran 2 transport recruitment events at The Hub, where the service is coordinated, and these events were promoted on Facebook and Instagram, and shared widely with our VCS contacts in Tonbridge and Malling.

Demand for the volunteer transport service is increasing and we continue to run recruitment events and online campaigns for more volunteer drivers.

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

Our weekly online newsletter 'Digest' is distributed to over 1300 subscribers with regular articles on volunteering news, events, training and opportunities.

In 2022, there were 3 networking events for the Voluntary & Community Sector, with topics discussed including 'Youth Volunteering' and 'Poverty and the Cost of Living Crisis', the latter looking at the impact on the voluntary sector and recruiting volunteers. The events have continued to be run online and attendance has been consistently high. Local organisations attending include; Heart of Kent Hospice, Compassionate Neighbours, Communigrow, Angel Lane CIC, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, Kent and Medway Youth Volunteering Project.

During Volunteers Week, on 1<sup>st</sup> June, we held a special event with a focus on 'appreciating volunteers not just during Volunteer Week, but throughout the year'. The attendees, consisting of various individuals and organisations from Kent, including Tonbridge and Malling, had the opportunity to update the group on their available volunteer positions and share positive volunteer stories that highlighted the significance and value of volunteers across Kent. The meeting also included a screening of a video about Involve Kent volunteers, exploring their motivations and experiences with volunteering. We were joined by a volunteer who shared his own personal experiences of volunteering and his motivation for getting involved in volunteering.

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.

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**

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We maintain contact through weekly newsletters which promote volunteering and other community initiatives. Our community engagement work continues with regular contact throughout 2022 with organisations in the community and frequent visits to organisations to help promote their opportunities and offer support and guidance around engagement. Our Engagement Officer, in 2022, supported Tonbridge organisations with an extensive leaflet drop through doors.

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. We have supported Tonbridge PCN to develop a Therapy Gardening Project, which actively recruits patients with long term conditions in to gardening projects, patients are supported by Involve's Horticultural Wellbeing Coordinators and in early 2023 we are recruiting a new raft of volunteers to support this work.

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

The Connect Well directory, [www.connectwellwestkent.org.uk](http://www.connectwellwestkent.org.uk) continues to be updated regularly and volunteer opportunities are advertised on [kentvolunteers.org.uk](http://kentvolunteers.org.uk). Social media is a key communication tool with 6382 'followers' and frequent updates.

We have a new website which will be launched shortly and will have a dedicated section on volunteering.

### **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**

During 2022 we worked collaboratively with Ashford Volunteer Centre and secured funding for a Kent Wide project to promote volunteering, including Tonbridge and Malling. 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**

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

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