

Voluntary and Community Sector Grants – Progress Updates

Age UK Maidstone, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge

Report for Financial Year 2023-2024

The 2023-2024 financial year has been a year of change for Age UK Maidstone, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, all of which has been positive. After 2 years of sharing a Chief Officer with Age UK Maidstone, in August 2023, Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and Age UK Maidstone merged to become Age UK Maidstone, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge. This gives the charity much more scope and resource to ensure that the older people in all of the districts that the charity covers are given the help and support that they need to live fulfilling and independent lives for as long as possible.

Central to the merge however has been the ethos and desire to keep the local hubs for all three districts and to this end, the office in Bradford Street is now the main office for Tonbridge and Sevenoaks with various services covering both areas now running from there. This has meant that we have been able to increase our presence in the town and have an office which is open for longer for older people to access when they need.

The Independent Living Support Service is now based at the Bradford Street office along with the safeguarding officer for the Tonbridge and Sevenoaks areas. The site is also open to the public to drop in for any support needs and a warm place, we have extending opening times. This service supports older people to enable to live as long as possible in their own homes. The Befriending Service also continues to be run from the Bradford Street office with 32 people having regular visits from 26 volunteers.

The Information and Advice Team continues to work in the Tonbridge and Malling area and between 1st April 2023 and 11th January 2023, the office responded to 2000 signposting queries as well as providing specific information and advice to 1999 clients. Of these, 73 have been supported to claim benefits and we have improved their lives financially to the tune of £362,177 per year. The full-time Information and Advice Officer retired in April 2023 and at the moment the service is run by one part-time Information and Advice Officer supported by a team of 8 volunteers. The Social Inclusion Officer and Befriending Co-ordinator have also been trained to help with blue badge applications and by having a bigger staff presence in the office than in previous years, clients' enquiries are able to be responded to in a much more timely manner.

In addition to the services that are running from the Bradford Street Office, we have also increased the services that are running. The Cognitive stimulation group on a Monday now has 12 regular clients and we are also running other activities such as coffee mornings, Dementia Cafes, Peer support groups, young onset Dementia. We have brought the footcare service in-house and there is a clinic once a week at Town Lock which is run by a fully qualified foot-care practitioner. We are in the process of recruiting a footcare nurse to offer the service in client's homes that unable to attend a clinic. This service is particularly over-subscribed and is important for the health and wellbeing of older people. We are hoping that we may be able to build on this over the coming year and offer a clinic on more days.

In January 2023, a new Dementia Day Centre at Town Lock opened and we are now at full capacity with 16 clients attending regularly (6 of whom use Age UK transport). In addition 11 clients from Tonbridge and Malling are regularly attending the Hollybush Day Centre in

Sevenoaks (9 attend the Dementia Day Centre and 5 attend the social days). Many attend more than one session a week. Of the clients attending Hollybush, 7 use Age UK transport. The day centre provision is particularly important as for those clients with dementia, it provides much needed respite for families and for those who attend the social days, it provides a highlight of the week and a chance to interact with others and alleviate some of the social isolation that is so prevalent with in the older age groups. The transport element too is often the crucial as to whether or not they can attend.

We also run an exercise group in Golden Green.

Once a month we are part of running a moto neurone support group in Tonbridge.

As an organisation, we are currently working to align the processes and procedures of the two organisations that we previously were and are in the process of recruiting a senior leadership team to lead and develop more services in the coming year. We are developing a new strategic plan which will embed the ethos of helping older people whilst still keeping a local feel to what we offer as we feel that that this important to ensure that the needs of local communities can be met. The future looks exciting as we look at what we can do towards supporting older people from the age of 50 through to end of life.

Imago

Tonbridge SLA Report – October - December 2023

Summary of activity delivered by Imago across Tonbridge and Malling District Q3 2023

- Imago Volunteer Centre continues to have NCVO Accredited Volunteer Centre status as well as with NAVCA.
- We have continued to support residents of Tonbridge and Malling District by providing a Volunteer Recruitment Service by liaising with local community groups and charities, running volunteer recruitment sessions within the district, alongside Tonbridge Job Centre.
- We continue to produce a newsletter bi-monthly featuring adverts for volunteer roles, good news stories, case studies and information on the benefits of volunteering. This is available on our website, is directly mailed to those on the distribution list and is linked to on social media.
- The Volunteer Centre ran an Advent Calendar campaign on our Facebook page in the lead up to Christmas. We used this as an opportunity to promote Imago Volunteering opportunities and those of organisations and charities we have worked with closely throughout 2023. We had an increase of new followers and an increase in post reach.
- We were approached before Christmas by an accountancy firm, VCS looking to do some volunteering as a team in the run up to Christmas. They were placed with Young Lives Foundation where they wrapped gifted presents for their young people. Everyone involved was thrilled and VCS thanked us on LinkedIn.
- We attended the Snodland Over 55s fair, arranged by local MP Tracey Crouch to promote our Dial 2 Drive service and volunteer opportunities. This was a huge event, well supported and attended by well over 700 people with 79 stands present.
- We attended the Funding For All Funding Conference in November and met with local organisations, letting them know about the support they can receive around volunteering opportunities, networking and promotional opportunities within the newsletter and on social media.
- Training for organisations has been requested and included one on DBS Checks – understanding eligibility for DBS checks. This was a very informative session for the organisations attending and will support them in their recruitment of volunteers and staff as it was tailored to the voluntary sector.
- We had an information stand at the CANWK Local Kent Services Information Day for people from Hong Kong to attend. We provided information on volunteering and other services.
- Dial 2 Drive has included posters visible at venues such as blood donation sessions, leisure facilities and public spaces. Christmas versions were created and will be replaced next quarter with spring versions, to keep the interest. Dial 2 Drive is included in the annually updated Social Activities in Tonbridge For Older Folk leaflet and is being updated for 2024 in the spring.
- We offer brokerage sessions to potential volunteers online, over the phone and in person. The in person sessions can be at regular drop-in sessions or at a community venue to suit the individual.

- The Volunteer Coordinator and Managers Forum continues to be a valuable platform for those across the area to share best practice, ideas and network. Topics of discussion have included DBS and Safer Recruitment, issues surrounding the volunteer sector attracting and recruiting of staff and volunteers, managing volunteers, finding suitable venues for short term volunteering keeping volunteers and clients safe.

Our upcoming meetings which are now being held in person, but also available to join online are:

2024

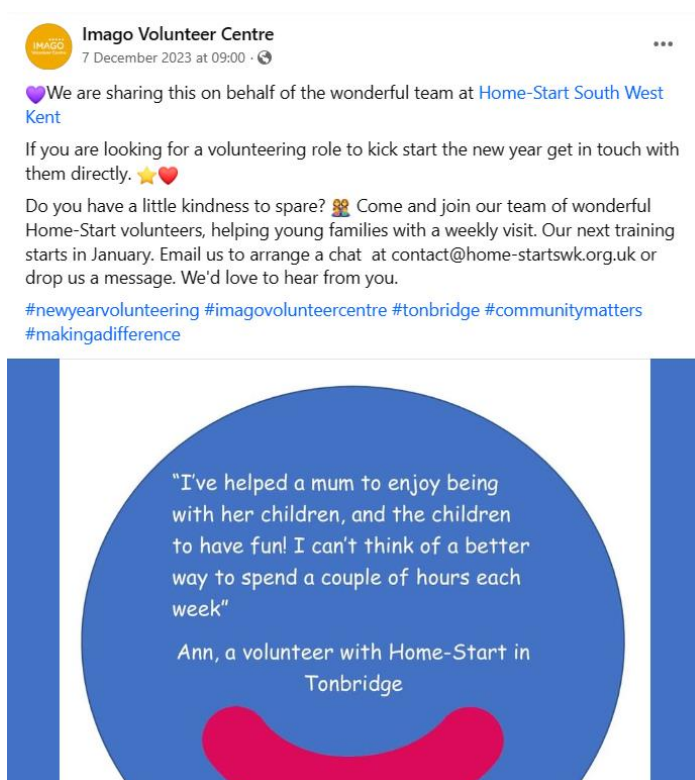
Thursday 18th January, Thursday 21st March, Thursday 16th May, Thursday 18th July, Thursday 19th September, Thursday 21st November

2025

Thursday 16th January, Thursday 20th March

Having the hybrid model enables the smaller organisations or those with limited time to attend remotely and still benefit from the content and fully participate in the session.

An example of the Social Media posts being shared for Tonbridge organisations:



Involve Kent - Report to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council 2023

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.

Whilst the public sector has seen an increase in volunteering numbers, the voluntary sector has continued to see a drop in participation and remains below pre pandemic levels. VCS organisations nationally, surveyed by the NVCO, reported both a drop in the number of individuals volunteering and the intensity of volunteering by each individual. There has been a shift towards remote volunteering, which now accounts for 30% of volunteer hours nationally. This reflects volunteer feedback that flexibility is one of the most important factors, with more volunteers now having taken up paid work, either full time or part time, or are providing childcare for their grandchildren. Challenges persist for small organisations providing face to face activities and support at a local level. The NCVO reports that VCS organisations have experienced a decrease in the range of volunteering activities, with key areas including fundraising and organising / helping with an activity seeing the greatest decline.

This report explores how Involve Kent worked with and supported volunteers from the Tonbridge and Malling area across the year 2023.

Reporting on the specifics in the SLA for 2023:

We currently have 42 volunteers from the Borough participating in Involve roles or activities including,

- Exercise groups volunteers
- Falls prevention class volunteers
- Volunteer Drivers and chaperones providing low cost transport
- Volunteer gardeners
- Buddying
- Administration
- Members accessing creative activities including knitting, sewing and craft
- Members accessing social groups to make new friends including coffee mornings and lunch groups
- Members aged 11-19 taking part in activity groups

Matching volunteers to opportunities within volunteer involving organisations

Tonbridge and Malling based VCS organisations are promoted through our extensive network Social Prescribers and Community Navigators who support individuals into volunteering roles, and we continue to grow and maintain our internal database of VCS organisation which is be referred to by staff in signposting/navigation roles and use this to match volunteers to suitable organisations.

In addition, we work with 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. In 2023 we collaboratively produced a newsletter of volunteering opportunities at Involve and our community partners which was shared by the network to encourage volunteering across multiple organisations.

We have increased the number of voluntary sector partners in Tonbridge and Malling who are funded by Involve under the KCC Universal Wellbeing contract from 8 to 12. All partners provide extensive volunteering opportunities and together they estimate to have over 1000 volunteers, including supported volunteers. We provide all partners with specialist support from CAP Enterprise to help with developing core policies, strategic planning, building capacity and identify funding streams and support with grant applications. Online workshops

timetables were advertised through our weekly newsletter, and intensive one to one support was given to 5 VCS organisations in Tonbridge and Malling Borough.

Volunteer roles include:

- Telephone befriending
- Horticulture and allotment
- 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, costume design and making
- Conservation and nature based activities
- 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

Volunteers supporting Involve Falls Prevention Classes

During 2023, our falls prevention volunteers in Tonbridge and Malling have supported us to deliver 4 falls prevention programmes in the Tonbridge, helping to improve the confidence and balance of 64 older people living in the Borough. Each class was supported by 2 volunteers every week who have contributed a total of 576 volunteering hours between them. The volunteers are supported by both our volunteer coordinator and specialist class instructors. We have established strong working relationships with them, they often support us at more than once a week and work effectively together as a team to cover absences ensuring a continuous service to the group participants which is essential for them to gain the maximum benefit from attending the 36 week long programme.

We provide volunteering information and signposting to all participants who complete the programme and encourage them to get involved if they feel able to, with their improved levels of confidence and reduced risk of falling.

Some feedback from a class instructor and participant:

'I could not run my classes without my volunteers, they are an essential part of the provision. They freely gift their time each week, helping to make the participants feel cared for, safe and heard.'

'She is a true inspiration to us all!! Her kindness and friendly nature shines through as she guides us through our exercises. She is an invaluable support to the instructor and each and every one of us!'

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

Whilst the increase in remote volunteering opportunities has widened access to volunteering, accessibility 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.

We currently have 4 active children's volunteers supporting our Connect! groups for young people in Tonbridge and Malling aged between 11-18 who have Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) or who are assessment pathways. In 2023 these volunteers supported 48 activity groups in Tonbridge and Malling. The activities included rock climbing, pantomime trips, chocolate making, craft and board games groups. These group activities help to empower young people to build confidence, resilience and wellbeing. The groups also provide the parents and carers with a break and the opportunity to meet with others who have shared experiences.

Involve Supported Volunteering in depth

Our dedicated Volunteer Coordinator supports volunteers on a 1-2-1 basis by training and inducting them at the start and then offering continued support whilst at Involve. They will meet with potential volunteers to ensure that they are matched with the right role for the individual, whether this is in Involve or at another organisation. Volunteers are offered regular support in the form of supervision, which will be in whichever format the volunteer prefers – for example some prefer a phone call, others like to have a more formal meeting. Potential volunteers might include clients that are being supported by Community Navigators or Actively Involved Wellbeing Support Workers. These will be supported by the worker to access information about volunteering roles and then to apply.

Wellbeing Support Workers can offer additional support such as attending volunteering activities when a volunteer first starts.

We support several volunteers with health conditions. 44% of volunteers have disclosed a health condition, with 57% of those having a long-term illness or health condition, and 14% having poor mental health. Other conditions included frailty, mobility needs or complex needs. Our support allows these volunteers to access opportunities and be offered ongoing support to enable them to continue to take part and to enjoy the things they love.

Volunteering helps people to remain active in their community, to access social opportunities and to learn or improve their skills.

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, 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. Many of our community partners now have more established volunteers as a result of clients feeling more confident and able to be more involved in their organisations.

We continue to work with 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 volunteering locally, we distribute leaflets to our existing Tonbridge volunteers and encouraging them to spread the word – they are our best ambassadors. We also place leaflets in local shops and cafes, and utilise word of mouth, to reach and recruit members from the Tonbridge and Malling local communities.

In September we attended the Tonbridge and Malling Seniors Forum Information and Advice Day to promote volunteering opportunities in Tonbridge and Malling. Details of the event were shared with our community partners who were also invited to come along to promote volunteering within their organisations.

In October we attended Tracey Crouch's over 55's Advice and Information Fair where we were invited to promote Involve's services and volunteering opportunities.

Promoting existing volunteer driver schemes within the area

During 2023 our volunteer drivers have continued to provide essential affordable transport for people living in Tonbridge and Malling. We have increased our pool of drivers in

Tonbridge and Malling to 18 and have provided affordable transport to 150 clients in the Borough totalling 2006 trips.

We have strengthened our links with the Rotary Club have developed new links with the Stroke Association in 2023. We actively work with both organisations to cross promote volunteering opportunities in the local community.

We ran 3 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.

We have actively promoted our online newsletter 'Digest' which is now distributed to over 1400 subscribers with weekly articles on volunteering news, events, training and opportunities.

Our Information Officer maps all organisations across Tonbridge & Malling and ensures that their current information is available for free online on our Directory of Services. There are currently 122 organisations mapped that are active in Tonbridge and Malling, with 26 of those based in the Borough. This platform is accessed by thousands of people each year, both individuals and professionals.

Involve facilitates and chairs the West Kent Health and Care Voluntary Sector Alliance, providing support and information to organisations across West Kent, bringing them closer together to promote cross-system working. This has included an in-person workshop which allowed for learning, sharing of knowledge and creation of networks. In addition, there have been 3 online meetings which have included topics such as 'volunteering in health' and guest speakers from the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Applied Research Collaboration who shared a bespoke VCS evaluation toolkit.

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

We maintain contact through weekly newsletters which promote volunteering and other community initiatives. Through our network of community partners, we facilitate regular meetings with all partners and share experiences and ideas around recruiting and supporting volunteers.

Providing information through the Involve Kent website and online directory

Information on volunteering is shared on our website and online directory. The Involve Kent website was relaunched in November 2023 and has a new and easier to use functionality, including an updated page on volunteering. We also share information about support for the sector, including small grant funding and the West Kent Health and Care Voluntary Sector Alliance. Our online directory features 122 organisations active in Tonbridge and Malling, with links to their websites for easy sourcing of further information on volunteering opportunities. We are relaunching our directory in February 2024, with a simpler and easier way to find information.

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, Falls Prevention Week.

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

Involve remains committed to keeping updated with changes and challenges in volunteering both locally and nationally. We have good relationships with other infrastructure organisations including Stronger Kent Communities and refer many organisations to them for support and accreditation. We are part of a network of infrastructure organisations and meet quarterly to share information/discuss development. We have attended Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Shared Prosperity Funding meetings in order to feed back on a fund to offer volunteering opportunities in the borough, and have shared information about this fund widely in the sector.

We have been part of a pilot programme for NHS England, 'Community Connectors', which has seen design and delivery of a health engagement programme led by volunteers. As part of this, we have written an in-depth evaluation of how the model might be used in other ways and in other areas and have fed into national learning events. We have used this project to develop our own learning and understanding of different types of volunteering and can use this experience to develop future opportunities.

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. In 2023 we completed 61 volunteer checks for 20 VCS organisations.



Mediation Schemes

First quarter updates for Maidstone Mediation and West Kent Mediation 2023-24

Neighbour,

1 Referrals

Family

1 Referral

Parent/Teen

2 Referrals

Schools

15 Peer mediators trained in one primary school.

1 mediation in secondary school.

Second quarter updates for Maidstone Mediation and West Kent Mediation 2023-24

Neighbour,

No Referrals

Family

1 Referral

Parent/Teen

No Referrals

Anger Management

No Referrals

Schools

12 Peer mediators trained in one primary school.

Third quarter updates for Maidstone Mediation and West Kent Mediation 2023-24

Neighbour,

Referral for multi parties in a block of flats regarding noise which has led to ASB. All parties contacted, mediators allocated. Several calls to each of the parties so far. To be continued next year.

Self referral regarding garden fences. Party 2 contacted. Waiting for response.

Family

Self referral for a blended family to have mediation. Parties contacted. Mediator allocated. Waiting for the young person to respond.

Parent/Teen

No Referrals

Anger Management

1 Referral

Schools

Visited 3 primary schools

31 peer mediators trained.

