



**Cheshire West  
Voluntary Action**  
Championing the community sector

# Community Partnerships Report 2024-25



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- building trust, influencing, inspiring

**Connecting**

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resilience**

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## **Engagement with Community Partnerships**

Since coordinating Community Partnerships in April 2024, Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA) has reenergised the initiative, with 588 people from 83 different organisations actively engaging with Community Partnerships through the main meetings and networking events. There were a total of 790 attendances at these meetings and events, equating to more than 1,600 collective hours of engagement.

As CWVA has built strong relationships across different sectors, there is now a wider range of people and organisations engaging with Community Partnerships. CWVA has created a fresh approach for people to build relationships and partnerships - many of them new - engaging community sector organisations, public sector organisations, social prescribers, primary care networks (PCNs), people with lived experience, businesses and many others.

While a key role of Community Partnerships is delivering or supporting projects, building relationships has been fundamental in the first year of Community Partnerships under CWVA's guidance.

80 people from 28 organisations attended a networking event organised by One Chester Community Partnership in November 2024.

Out of the 36 people who completed a follow-up survey, everyone said they'd made new connections, while 92 per cent felt the connections would lead to possible joint working in future.

Following the event, the Bren Project has been in discussions with Hoole URC Church about running a joint café, while a Council employee has helped Andy's Man Club find its first venue in Chester to deliver services.

Other Community Partnerships, like Frodsham, Helsby and Elton (FHE) Together and Rural Together, have been running community roadshows to engage the public and highlight the wide range of support available in the community.

107 people - a mix of organisations with stalls and the public - attended the roadshow hosted by Rural Together in January 2025.

## **Delivering successful projects through Community Partnerships**

The structure of Community Partnerships varies from location to location, with some using their funding for infrastructure and others deciding to directly deliver projects. Some Community Partnerships are made up of small, grassroots community sector organisations run by volunteers, while others have larger organisations across sectors involved. There isn't a one size fits all approach for Community Partnerships.

No matter the format, each Community Partnerships understands, influences and addresses the needs in their local communities, linking in with the priorities of Cheshire West Cheshire.

### ***Spotlight on Frodsham, Helsby and Elton (FHE) Together***

Frodsham Bee Friends, a not-for-profit member of the FHE Together Community Partnership, brings people together, makes connections and creates networks to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

With social isolation exacerbating after the COVID-19 pandemic, a passionate team of volunteers set up Bee Friends, wanting to make an impact in their local community.

Originally funded by Community Partnerships, Bee Friends has gone from strength to strength with the support of FHE Together.

Bee Friends is also listening to people with lived experience to continue developing its services to meet local needs.

#### *Case study*

A Bee Friends member moved to Frodsham from Somerset and the weekly drop-in sessions have helped her settle into a new area that she was unfamiliar with.

She said: "On my first day, I stood at the door, I hesitated and I wondered whether I could go in.

"I'm so glad I did as my Thursday mornings are now part of my life in Frodsham.

"I love the people who surround me. The volunteers wait on us hand and foot – cups of tea and biscuits – and they're so nice. If we've got a problem, we know we can talk to them."

Another Bee Friends member said: "We can chat together, get a free cup of coffee and exchange ideas.

"Every now and then, I might pick up a good idea from somebody. Something I couldn't have imagined, but they put it into my head."

Iris Keating, Treasurer of Frodsham Bee Friends and Chair of FHE Together, said: "We always just muck in together and I like to think that, when one of our visitors comes in, they have no idea who is a Steering Group member, or who is the Chair, as we don't stand on ceremony.

"If you've got a black polo shirt on with our logo, you're one of our volunteers and you're there to serve tea, coffee, biscuits but, most of all, friendship as that's what we're all about."

### *Impact*

- 80 people regularly attended the weekly drop-in sessions at Bee Friends, engaging with arts, crafts and other social activities
- There were a collective 1,962 volunteer hours during 2024-25
- For the annual running costs of £10,300, Bee Friends is delivering a social return on investment (SROI) of £2.64 per £1 invested - based on value of community development, engagement in crafts or other social activities and the value of volunteering per hour

### *Key learning*

- Community Partnerships funding helped Bee Friends begin delivering services in the local community, highlighting how just a modest amount of initial start-up investment in grassroots community sector organisations can have a lasting impact
- Highlighting its social impact, Bee Friends has been able to access further funding, such as the National Lottery

### [Watch a video about Frodsham Bee Friends](#)



### ***Spotlight on Neston and Willaston***

The Neston and Willaston Community Partnership was alerted to a specific issue based on the unique geography of the neighbourhood.

Due to this Community Partnership spanning a border with the Wirral Place area, community groups, public sector services and residents through Healthwatch highlighted to the Community Partnership Steering Group the poorer outcomes that people admitted to Arrowe Park Hospital were experiencing, particularly at discharge.

This was leading to patients who were ready to come home having to stay in hospital longer as there were no public sector services working across the border to support low level care needs.

Due to the Community Partnership structure being supported by CWVA, having the enthusiastic input of a local GP and the ability to be an agile group that can adapt to local needs, a sub group was arranged with the sole focus of improving outcomes in this area.

The sub group assessed discharge data, worked in partnership with NHS and Council partners and heard feedback from the community to create and fund a model to deliver a discharge service.

Neston Community Youth Centre (NCYC), with a grant from Cheshire Community Action (CCA) and using some of its charity reserves, started working with Age UK Wirral to provide low level discharge support for patients.

This support was provided by a part-time coordinator and five volunteers to bring patients out of hospital by eradicating any low-level care or support challenges that prevented people from coming home.

This service is now integrated into the hospital and is regularly receiving referrals from public sector services, as well as being present on the hospital site to physically enable relationships and connections with the person and their family and make sure they get home more quickly.

#### *Case study*

Joan, who has family nearby and a complex relationship with them, was readmitted to hospital following a fall at home, spending a further two months in hospital.

After two failed discharges because of her social needs, Joan was supported by NCYC and Age UK Wirral in the following ways.

- A home visit to check her suitability for discharge
- Liaising with the Home Care team to make sure everything was in place for the discharge
- Working with her local GP to arrange a home visit
- Wellbeing visits and liaising with Adult Social Care around safeguarding concerns and referrals for further or ongoing support

#### *Impact*

- Although this service is mainly ran by volunteers, 48 referrals have already been received to date
- Out of the 48 people, 26 had an initial visit, 10 received telephone support, 12 had some type of support from volunteers e.g. visits or phone calls, and seven had onward referrals to either Neston Angels, Healthbox CIC or a community therapy team
- The social return on investment (SROI) for this project is £4.13 per £1 invested - based on the value of befriending adults and the elderly, cost of reducing loneliness, volunteering costs per hour, and the average cost of an inpatient stay in hospital

- The 12-month cost of a part-time coordinator - Band 4 at 50% whole time equivalent (WTE) is £16,000 - making a real-time saving of £14,000 to the system

#### *Key learning*

- Giving status to the community sector to enable it to work collaboratively, by accessing data and being present on a hospital site, can reduce many barriers
- For some people struggling to get discharged from hospital, their requirements aren't driven by a medical need so the community sector can offer a sustainable alternative and reduce the demand on public sector services
- Innovative funding was accessed by the community sector for this pilot that wouldn't have been available for NHS services
- Recruiting and supporting volunteers has made this pilot more sustainable
- Although outcomes are being achieved, much more could be achieved with sustainable and long-term funding as part of this model

#### ***Spotlight on One Chester***

One Chester Community Partnership identified a need for activities that women and girls would feel comfortable taking part in as residents had highlighted that not everyone wants to visit a gym or get involved with more intense exercise.

After an introduction to England Netball at a One Chester networking event, the Community Partnership funded six weeks of walking netball sessions, equipment for Chester FC Community Trust and training for people to become walking netball hosts. This funding totalled just £1,641.92.

#### *Case study*

One participant said: "Walking netball is exactly what it sounds like – a slower, low-impact version of the game many of us loved in school.

"No running or jumping, but all the fun, teamwork and laughter. No pressure, just smiles, encouragement and plenty of giggles when we forget the rules."

Another added: "The sessions are run by a fantastic coach who makes everyone feel comfortable, regardless of age, ability, or fitness level, it doesn't matter. We're just a team."

#### *Impact*

- Up to 16 people attended the initial six weeks of sessions held by England Netball, growing to 25 as sessions have continued and are now being led by Chester FC Community Trust. This has helped create a real team spirit, with a team of nine attending the EN Northwest Summer Walking Netball Festival and finishing second
- 14 people engaged with six-hour training sessions to become walking netball hosts and deliver sessions in their own organisations, helping these activities reach a wider range of people in different communities. One of them is delivering the sessions at Chester FC Community Trust, as highlighted above
- Even though this project is only just up and running, the project has already delivered an estimated social return on investment (SROI) of £2.60 for every £1 invested. The

training and development opportunities for aspiring walking netball hosts has an estimated impact worth £3,654 - based on the costs involved with training to enable people to learn and progress in their careers. The contribution of sport on wellbeing for 25 people taking part in walking netball sessions is estimated at £775, although this figure will increase significantly once the trained walking netball hosts roll out sessions through their own organisations

### *Key learning*

- The networking opportunities provided by Community Partnerships are imperative as, without the One Chester networking event, the relationship with England Netball wouldn't have been established
- Investing in infrastructure can have long lasting impacts. In this case, the equipment will allow walking netball sessions to be held at Chester FC Community Foundation for many years to come, while the training has upskilled staff across the Chester area to enable many people to take part in walking netball



### ***Spotlight on Rural Together***

Healthbox's Rural Social Prescribing team works across the system to help people get the support they need in the community.

The Rural Together Community Partnership is a fundamental part of the Rural Social Prescribing team's approach, using networks to put in place efficient processes for signposting to local services.

### *Impact*

- 1,468 referrals have been received by the service. The key needs for people being referred were talking therapy and counselling (32.8%), mental health (29.6%), and loneliness and isolation (9.5%)
- The total number of GP appointments for people before the support of social prescribers was 3,348 compared to 1,100 after the support, equating to a 67% reduction in GP visits
- This makes a saving of between £67,440 and £125,888 for the NHS depending on the level of intervention by GPs, based on the average GP appointment cost of £30 to £56

### *Key learning*

- In the rural area, Community Partnerships has helped create networks, such as the Rural Together Community Roadshows, and systems that have contributed to the success of Healthbox CIC's Rural Social Prescribing team
- Having sound local knowledge and partnerships, particularly with the challenges presented in rural areas, are key for roles like social prescribing that rely on effective signposting. It takes a whole system approach to achieve these outcomes

### **Spotlight on Winsford**

Winsford Community Partnership identified the need to engage with local businesses to support the priorities set out for the local area, one of them being Morrisons.

Engagement with businesses was seen as an effective way of reaching workforces that could be supported by the Community Partnership, as well as working with businesses around their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to benefit local communities.

### *Impact*

- Through the relationship between Winsford Community Partnership and Morrisons, 500 Christmas presents were donated to community groups, 12 Christmas lunch hampers were given to families in need, and tea and coffee was distributed to various groups and warm spaces. The typical value of a visit to a foodbank or service redistributing goods, based not only on the cost of the items but the wider health and wellbeing benefits is just over £122. You could estimate that this act of generosity from Morrisons, supported by the Community Partnership, is worth tens of thousands of pounds
- One employee was given paid time off work to attend a course to support their child with ADHD, while another person was directed to the Living Well bus to receive their first smear test in nine years

- The Community Partnership has been using the health and wellbeing board, staff newsletter and Facebook page, providing an opportunity to share news from organisations linked to the Community Partnership with hundreds of Morrisons staff
- The Living Well bus has been attending Morrisons and other locations in the Winsford area, with the Community Partnership playing an important role in increasing the number of visitors from nine in April 2024 to 90 in December 2025. If these 81 people have avoided a visit to a GP after accessing the Living Well bus instead, you could estimate that this has saved between £2,430 and £4,536 based on the average cost of GP visits

### *Key learning*

- While Community Partnerships will only fund not-for-profit or public sector organisations, the relationships with local businesses are important to achieve positive outcomes in the community. Many businesses have large workforces that might need health and wellbeing support in the community, or could play a key role in supporting others to the support they need
- Partnership working across sectors in Winsford Community Partnership, like others in the Cheshire West area, is fundamental to achieving positive outcomes. The networks created have led to many new projects or relationships that will have a lasting impact

## Summary of lessons learnt, impact and next steps for Community Partnerships

In the first year with CWVA's support, Community Partnerships have been reenergised, with improved relationships across sectors at a local level. Networking events and roadshows have helped drive engagement alongside the main Community Partnership meetings, sub groups and workstreams.

Each Community Partnership has a unique structure and approach, tailored to local needs, geography and capabilities, from grassroots, volunteer-led groups to clinical leads, working successfully for their respective areas. Having a 'one size fits all' approach for Community Partnerships doesn't always work.

As a lot of focus has been put on reenergising Community Partnerships and investing in the right infrastructure, demonstrating social impact in a short timeframe can sometimes be difficult. As Frodsham Bee Friends has highlighted, you don't always see the impact or saving in six months' time, but Community Partnerships can play a fundamental role in understanding and influencing local needs and kickstarting projects that will have a long-lasting impact further down the line.

Despite these, many projects are already delivering impressive social impact in their communities and demonstrating true savings to the wider system, easing the pressure on stretched public sector services. Further investment in prevention and early intervention, listening to communities about what matters to them, can continue this trend.

Moving forward, Community Partnerships will continue to understand, influence and address the needs of local communities, linking in with Cheshire West Place priorities and using tools like enhanced case finding to target activity and outcomes in the most effective way.

Building on the impact already being made in local communities, Community Partnerships will be using a more consistent approach to demonstrate their social impact and social return on investment (SROI) using tools like the Social Value Engine.

As highlighted earlier in the report, a lot of focus in Community Partnerships is still focused on having the right infrastructure, bringing key partners together to drive activity, so tools like ripple effect mapping will also be explored to look at both the intended and unintended outcomes achieved by Community Partnerships.

Early intervention and prevention activities, including physical activity, falls prevention, supporting mental health, reducing social isolation and cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention, will be key focuses across Community Partnerships.

These types of activities are a key part of the community sector's offer and can help prevent residents accessing primary care.

Let's Talk and the Living Well bus will also be supported by Community Partnerships, helping make sure:

- the most appropriate locations are being used to engage communities
- the most relevant organisations are attending to offer the support needed
- all partners are working together to promote the offer as widely as possible.