

PROJECT REPORT

September 2026

Project ID: 20282623

COMMUNITY FUND

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LETS RECAP: 'COMMUNITIES THAT CAN' PROJECT ID: 20282623

Our Communities That Can project is a three-year initiative to strengthen community cohesion and local action across Mid Devon. Its core purpose is to connect residents across towns and villages, and rural locations, boost volunteering and support community-led activities, thereby improving wellbeing and inclusion of residents in Mid Devon.

Now a year and a half into the project, we're well underway in terms of meeting the objectives we set out to achieve. We're hosting regular networking and listening events in each of our Mid Devon towns, supporting and forming new local groups, and have established the Volunteer Hub office- serving to match volunteers with community projects.

Our aim has always been to serve the whole of Mid-Devon, and with our rural community builder joining the team we are on course to broaden our impact in villages, hamlets and rural settlements.

Sustainability is key to our work, and through our asset-based community development and infrastructure, like the Volunteer Hub, we ensure that local activities and networks continue beyond the funding period.

> "It's been fantastic to see communities across Mid Devon take ownership of the ideas and opportunities that matter to them. Over the first half of the project, we've built strong relationships, supported new community activity and created new ways for people to get involved. What's particularly exciting is that we're not simply delivering activities, we're helping to build the confidence, connections and local infrastructure that will enable communities to continue taking action long after the project comes to an end."
>
> **Hayley Denham, Communities That Can Project Manager, Involve**



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STRATEGIC AIMS

Communities that Can is a focused initiative working across Mid Devon to build on the strengths of local people and places. We aim to build a stronger, more connected Mid Devon by supporting communities to lead, grow and thrive. We will do this by:

DEVELOPING WAYS TO CONNECT

Co-creating, supporting and leading activities or groups, shaped by the needs and ideas of our communities.

SUPPORTING ACTION

Support meaningful action with a focus on creating lasting impact in the lives of individuals and communities.

SUPPORT A STRONG VCSE SECTOR

Help develop strong communities within the sector, through connection training, and support.

BE THE VOICE OF THE SECTOR IN MID DEVON

Raise the profile of Involve to become the leading voluntary sector organisation in Mid-Devon.

ENGAGEMENT & LISTENING

Creating inclusive ways for people to get involved and share their ideas, whether through events, meetings, or online spaces.

PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING & PARTICIPATION

Provide opportunities and support, enabling people to participate and feel valued.

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THE VOLUNTEER HUB

As part of our aim to become the leading voluntary sector organisation in Mid-Devon promoting, championing and supporting voluntary and community action, our goal has been to re-establish a Volunteer Hub. This is as in direct response to organisations and individuals who request our support. Surveys of local need highlighted that organisations find an in-person approach more helpful and effective especially as groups currently report that attracting new volunteers is an ongoing challenge.

Our strategic aims are: Partnership Development: Collaborate with other VCSE and health and wellbeing organisations, local businesses to create a network of support. **Volunteer Incentives:** Offer training, recognition, meeting opportunities and other incentives to encourage long-term commitment. **Events and Workshops:** Organise community events and workshops to engage potential volunteers and showcase the impact of their work. **Community Outreach:** Launch a targeted outreach campaign to raise awareness about volunteering opportunities.

Following our relocation to New Hall and lots of hard work to make the new offices and Hub welcoming, accessible and give them some 'Involve sparkle', we officially launched the Volunteer Hub on 29 July 2026. The launch welcomed over 40 people, including organisations, partners, volunteers and community members, showcasing work across Involve and Communities That Can. There was a real buzz throughout the Hub, highlighting the value of a welcoming space where local organisations, community groups, committee members and councillors can network, share ideas and build relationships. One word stood out from the positive feedback: **Connect**. We have built on this by launching **Let's Get Involved**, our new monthly informal networking group.



> "I am leaving the Hub launch feeling really inspired. It would be great to have more networking opportunities like this on a regular basis! "
>
> **Paul White, All About the Place**

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THE VOLUNTEER HUB DEVELOPMENT

Partnership Development: We recorded 23 partnership activities between July and September, strengthening links with VCSE organisations and developing work with Devon Communities Together around village halls and potential rural 'micro-hubs'. We are also exploring how our Volunteer Register could link with Devon Connect, enabling individuals to share their skills and interests while organisations advertise opportunities or identify potential volunteers. This could create a more joined-up approach across Devon, making it easier for people to find and offer their skills beyond their immediate area.

Volunteer Incentives and Support: The Hub's Volunteer Register is gaining traction and providing insight into people's motivations, skills, interests and preferred ways of volunteering, including increasing interest in flexible and occasional opportunities. Responding to feedback, we replaced our Word-based registration process with an accessible, mobile-friendly online form. Our Volunteer – Hub – Organisation model is also beginning to embed, supported by our membership offer and practical guidance, tools and templates for organisations.

Events, Workshops and Recognition: We are developing Volunteer Confidence, Disability Awareness and trustee workshops, alongside Volunteer Connect, our new peer-support group. These aim to build skills, confidence, connections and a positive volunteer experience. Looking ahead, we plan to build on Volunteers' Week and develop a volunteer conference and celebration as part of Involve's 40th anniversary.



Community Outreach: The Hub provides both a physical base and a route into communities across Mid Devon. Through partnerships, events and potential rural micro-hubs, we are exploring how to extend support beyond Tiverton. 96 individuals were engaged between July and September, helping us build awareness, relationships and understanding of local needs. Our work supports the wider ambition for resilient, connected communities, reflecting the direction of NCVO's strategy and the NHS 10 Year Health Plan around neighbourhood working and prevention. We are also exploring a Volunteer Passport, helping volunteers carry relevant skills, training and experience between opportunities while maintaining organisations' responsibilities for safe volunteer management.

Overall, the Hub is becoming more than a physical space. It is developing into a connected pathway between volunteers, organisations and communities, with our focus now on strengthening and extending this across Mid Devon.

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VINTAGE FARMERS: TACKLING ISOLATION AND IMPROVING WELLBEING

For many semi-retired and retired farmers, stepping back from farming can mean losing an important source of routine, purpose and social connection. This can contribute to loneliness and isolation, particularly in our dispersed rural communities. There are also wider concerns around mental health within the farming community, with ONS research identifying elevated suicide risk among some agricultural occupations.

In response, we established the Vintage Farmers Group in Crediton, in partnership with the Farming Community Network, providing a regular lifeline for semi-retired and retired farmers to meet, socialise and connect with others who understand their experiences. This group has become a central feature in the local farming community with 91 regular attendees in Crediton, enabling us to expand into Tiverton which has expanded to 60 members. We are now also connecting with smaller farming groups across Mid Devon, including them in our wider network and inviting them to activities. This has widened the support network for the farmers that attend and has had a significant impact on the isolation experienced in rural Mid-Devon.

The groups provide peer-to-peer support, helping farmers maintain friendships, reduce isolation and create a sense of belonging. The informal nature of the groups makes it easier for conversations and mutual support to develop naturally. We regularly bring in speakers to address things that matter to the group, such as Mid Devon Messenger - a talking newspaper for those with sight impairment, or local a solicitor to aid with succession planning.







> “It’s good to have things like this to come to. You get to have a chat, see people and get out of the house. That’s important, especially for your mental health. With everything that’s going on with bluetongue at the moment, it’s good to be able to talk to other farmers who understand what you’re going through.”
>
> **David Chapple, Tiverton Vintage Farmers Group**

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VINTAGE FARMERS: CASE STUDY

Colin and Margaret Radford: Reconnecting through Vintage Farmers

Colin and Margaret Radford have farmed all their lives. Colin was born into farming, initially working on a mixed farm before moving into dairy and arable. As he got older, he gradually began to step back from the farm, with the next generation taking on more of the work. At 85, he no longer farms.

The transition away from farming brought significant changes to Colin's daily life. Arthritis in his hands and arms has affected his strength and ability to carry out jobs himself, while a heart attack a couple of years ago has also meant that he needs to take things more easily. But as Colin puts it, "Does a farmer ever retire?!"

For many farmers, stepping away from the farm can mean losing not only a job, but also a routine, a sense of purpose and the social connections that have been part of everyday life for many years. This is one of the reasons the Vintage Farmers group was established, in response to loneliness and isolation experienced by older and retired farmers. Colin first heard about Vintage Farmers through Margaret, who had spoken to someone involved with the Crediton group. Joining the group was not initially Colin's idea, but he decided to go along and quickly found that he enjoyed meeting people he had not seen for a long time.



For Colin, the group provides an important opportunity to get out of the house and spend time with people who share his background and understand the farming way of life. He reflected:
"A lot of people don't get out from one week to the next." He also recognised the importance of social contact for wellbeing, saying that it is "good for mental health to get out" and that the group brings together people who are "like-minded".

The importance of the group to Colin and Margaret was particularly clear when they celebrated their joint 90th birthday this summer. Rather than asking for gifts, they asked guests to make donations to the Vintage Farmers group because they feel strongly it is an important cause. As Margaret and Colin recognise, farming and life after farming can be lonely, and having someone to talk to can make a real difference.

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BUILDING LOCAL CANCER SUPPORT ACROSS MID DEVON

A cancer diagnosis significantly affects families and friends. Loved ones may experience anxiety, depression, or stress as they try to support the patient, and their coping strategies directly influence the patient's experience. Communities play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of cancer. Through our community development work, we have heard first-hand about the impact cancer can have on individuals, families and carers, including feelings of isolation and a need for accessible, local support. By listening to residents and working alongside health professionals, community organisations and local partners, we have helped turn this identified need into practical support within our communities.

This has led to the development of cancer support groups across all three of Mid Devon's main towns: Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton. Each group provides a welcoming, informal space where people affected by cancer, including family members and carers, can meet others, share experiences and build connections.

Alongside peer support, our wider cancer work has focused on raising awareness of signs and symptoms, screening and the support available locally. We've had a presence at health and wellbeing fairs and creating one in partnership with the RD&E hospital to be held in Tiverton later this year and has included promotion of the Cancer Awareness Project through local hospital radio.

Together, these activities are helping people feel less alone, more informed and better connected, while demonstrating the wider Communities That Can approach: listening to communities, bringing people together and supporting local action that can improve wellbeing.



"People are going through similar things so there is a great deal of understanding without having to explain yourself. We also can share anxieties and no one minds or has similar experiences so can relate."
Crediton Cancer Support Group

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CULLOMPTON GREEN GROUP

Following the need for a sustainable and resilient community that values the environment and the well-being of its inhabitants the Cullompton Green Group has now officially launched, bringing local residents and organisations together to make Cullompton greener and more sustainable.

Supported with £20,000 two year funding from the Awards for All Environment Fund and a further £5,000 from Mid Devon Council, the group held its launch event in July, creating an opportunity for residents to find out more, share their ideas and help shape the group's future.

The launch demonstrated a strong appetite for community-led environmental action, with residents suggesting ideas including repair cafés, seed swaps, surplus food initiatives, community growing and further clothes swaps. Several people have also volunteered to get involved, providing a positive foundation for the group's development.

The group builds on work already delivered through the CTC project, including clothes swaps and the Pre-Loved Prom pilot, and will now turn the ideas gathered from local people into future activities. With a repair cafe due to launch in October and wild seed planting in the pipeline there's plenty to get excited about.

This is a strong example of the Communities That Can approach in practice: providing the support and resources for residents to come together, develop their own ideas and take action on issues that matter to their community.







"It was fantastic to see people already wanting to volunteer and help shape the future of the group at our launch event.
This is just the beginning, we're so excited to work alongside our volunteers to turn these ideas into reality."

Carla Crofts,
Cullompton Community Builder

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AREA UPDATES

Community building projects are essential for creating vibrant, resilient, and inclusive communities that can adapt to and thrive in changing circumstances and is a key aspect of the project. Our community builders have become an integral part of their specific towns. Alongside chairing Community Wellbeing Alliance meetings they run regular Listening cafes to hear the voices of their communities to inform their work.

CREDITON

In Crediton, our community builder has continued to build connections with local residents and organisations, helping turn community ideas into new opportunities for people to meet, connect and get involved. Alongside her ongoing work with existing groups, Kath has supported the development of new activities such as a 'Have-a-go Cycling' group, a neuro-diverse peer-to-peer support group and the set up of a Community Day in partnership with Active Crediton. This acted as a pilot and now will now roll out across Tiverton and Cullompton.

TIVERTON

Our Tiverton Community Builder, Alice, is developing a Community Cookery Hub in partnership with Allies and Mid Devon Housing, supporting tenants transitioning from care into independent living to build practical cooking skills and confidence. Work is also underway to establish a Cancer Craft Group, providing a gentle and informal way for people affected by cancer to connect with others. In addition to creating new support groups, we are ensuring the continuation of well-established groups with support, such as a Disability Friendship group which was at risk of termination. Ongoing networking has sparked an exciting new idea: to launch a pop-up shop in the town centre over the Christmas period, providing smaller local charities with a physical presence and an opportunity to showcase their work, connect with residents and offer additional support to the community at a time when it is needed most.



> Communities That Can is helping to strengthen Tiverton's community spirit by bringing people together, empowering residents to lead local action and supporting a more connected, resilient and inclusive town. By focusing on what communities can achieve rather than what they lack, the initiative is helping turn local ideas into meaningful change.
>
> **Steve Lodge,**
> **DCC Councillor**

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CULLOMPTON

In Cullompton, our Community Builder, has continued to develop a range of activities and partnerships which bring local people together. Following Involve Mid Devon's Christmas tree display at National Trust Killerton last year, Carla is now planning a series of community craft sessions where local people can create nature-themed decorations for this year's charity tree. She has also been working again with the Keystone Project to deliver further 'Cooking on a Budget' sessions, this time bringing the sessions to a new venue at Cullompton Community Centre.

Alongside her work developing the Cullompton Green Group, Carla continues to run a monthly Cancer Support Group at the Steamer Café, providing a relaxed and informal space for people affected by cancer to meet and connect with others. She has also been delivering cancer awareness work within the wider community, helping to raise awareness of cancer signs and symptoms and encouraging people to take up cancer screening when invited.

RURAL

Since establishing the new Rural Community Builder role for Crediton and Tiverton, a strong focus has been placed on building relationships, listening to residents and identifying opportunities to strengthen rural communities. A social media presence has been established to raise awareness of local activities and encourage engagement and is already attracting attention. Work with Crediton BAPS (Baby and Parenting Support Group) has highlighted challenges faced by both volunteers and new parents. Volunteers have expressed concerns about sustaining the group, while parents have shared experiences of isolation and the need for accessible support. Support is being provided to develop a funding application for equipment, venue hire and refreshments to help secure the group's future. Community conversations have identified a lack of local meeting spaces in some villages, particularly Copplestone, where residents report limited opportunities to connect without travelling into Crediton.

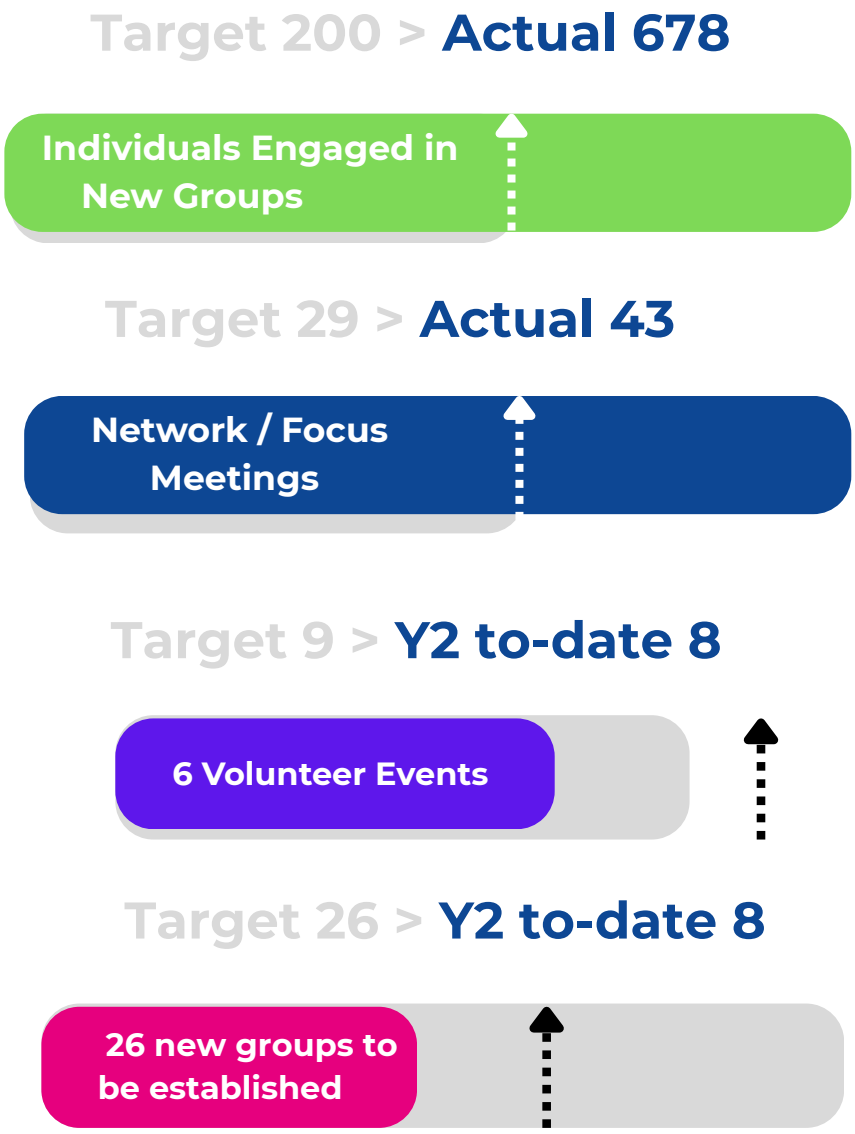
The role has also involved developing links with people leading or planning land-based community projects in Yeoford, Billes Hollow and Bow. These include market-growing, ornamental gardening, and social and therapeutic horticulture initiatives. A connection has been made with a volunteer trained in social and therapeutic horticulture, creating opportunities to develop Gardening-through-Grief activities that support wellbeing and social connection.

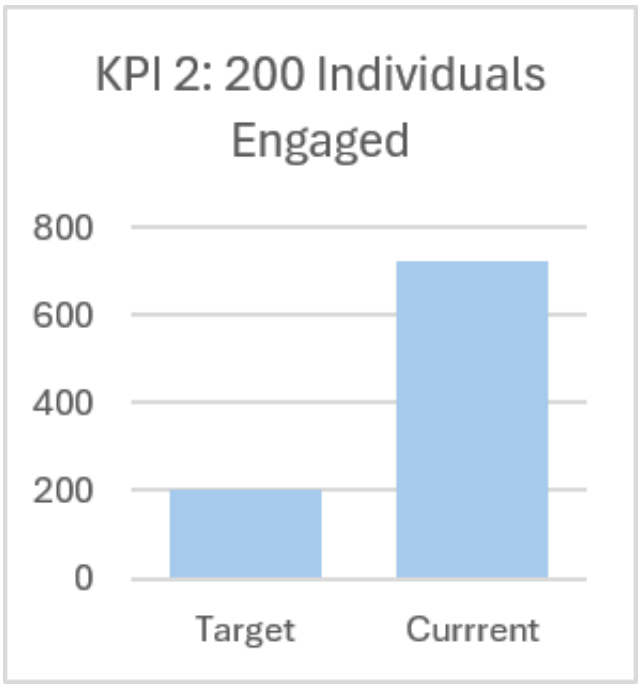
Transport has emerged as a key theme. Many residents report that limited bus services and high travel costs make it difficult to access activities, services and community opportunities. Future work includes a listening event on rural bus services and a youth engagement event being developed with Queen Elizabeth's School to explore how rural community life can be improved for young people. Overall, the role has strengthened local networks, identified barriers to participation, supported community groups and laid the foundations for future community-led projects and partnerships.

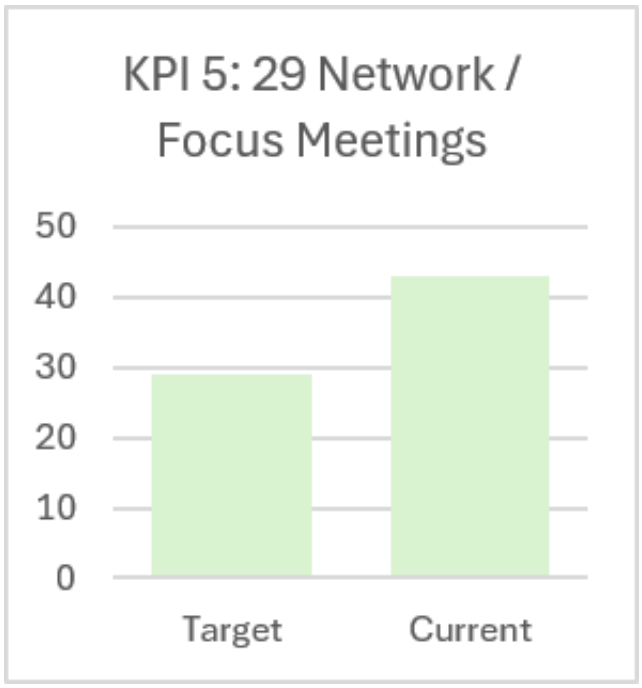
HOW IS THE PROJECT PERFORMING?

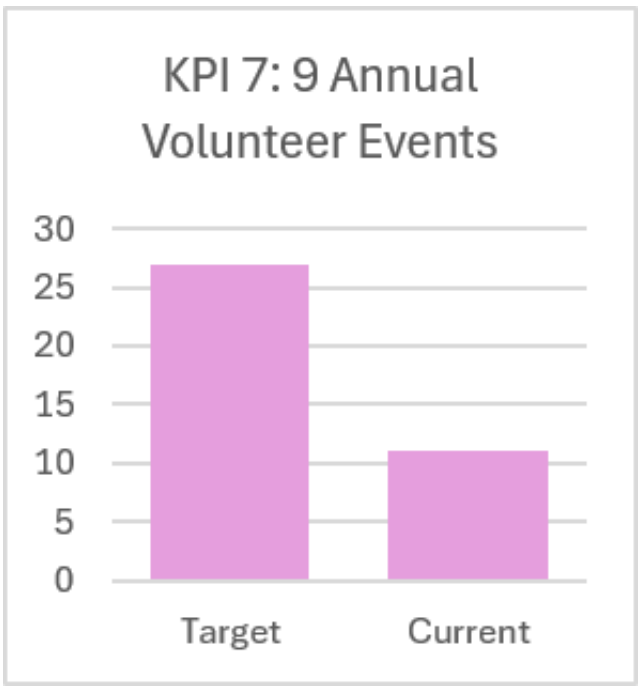
Year 2 of the project has built significantly on year 1. The Volunteer Hub is becoming established and we are performing particularly well on networking and engaging individuals in our activities.

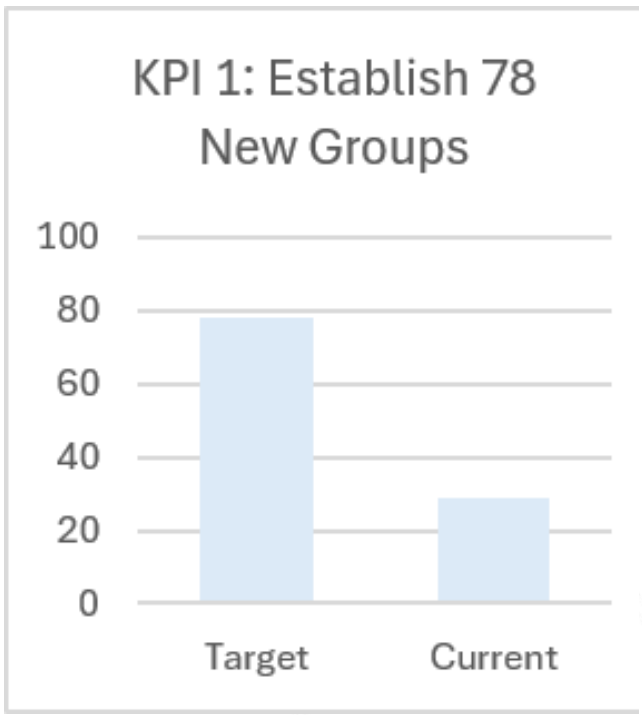
Between April and September 2026, we delivered 43 Networking / Listening sessions, established 8 new groups, had 311 conversations to understand what's needed in our towns, launched our new Mid Devon Volunteer Hub, established a drop-in Networking Group and ran a Community Advisory board meeting.











34 new volunteers recruited

361 Attended Listening Events

155 attended Community Wellbeing Alliances

216% Increase in Tiverton online followers

2 new peer-to-peer cancer support groups

1369+ Social Media connections

12 Vintage Farmer gatherings

11 Volunteer events

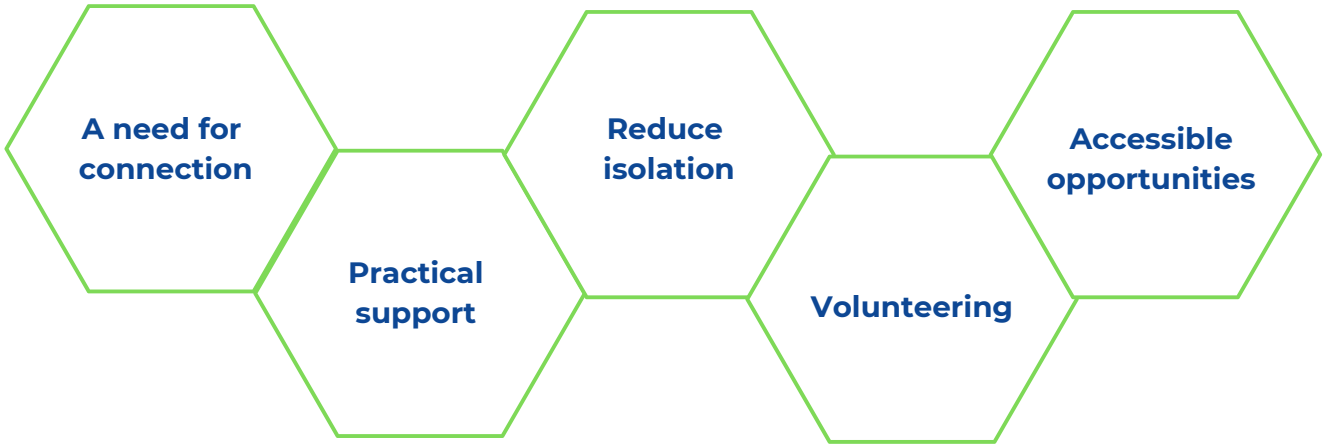
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COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The Communities That Can project starts with listening. Everything we have developed so far has been shaped by what people living and working in our communities have told us they need. We gather insight in a variety of ways; regular listening events, community conversations, monthly social community questions, local events and our quarterly Community Wellbeing Alliance (CWA) meetings. The CWA provides an important channel for community organisations to share what they are seeing and hearing from the people they support.

WHAT ARE WE HEARING?



FROM LISTENING TO ACTION

We have adapted our Community Wellbeing Alliance meeting notes to capture (and report) community insight more consistently, helping us identify emerging needs and respond to them. Most importantly, we act on what we hear. Community mapping and listening helped inform the development of groups such as our loca Cancer Peer Support and Vintage Farmers. Feedback around practical skills, connection and isolation is helpin shape further activity. Our Volunteer Hub also provides a route to make new community-led ideas sustainable, connecting people who want to get involved with organisations and groups that need volunteers.

> Having Carla, our Community Builder in Cullompton, is a real asset to our town. She is proactive in bringing local organisations together, building strong partnerships and helping to turn ideas into projects that benefit our community. From establishing the Chatty Bench and running successful Clothes Swaps at community events, to setting up the Green Team, securing significant grant funding and working towards a Repair Cafe, she is making a real difference. This kind of dedicated community support is something many towns do not have, and we are very fortunate to have Carla in Cullompton.
>
> **Town Mayor and Chair Councillor Tony Spring**

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WHAT WE'VE LEARNED SO FAR

Communities That Can is now firmly embedded within the Mid Devon community. Through our work to date, we have demonstrated Involve's role as a convenor of local organisations and as a source of support for grassroots charities and community groups. We continue to learn and develop our approach. During the first half of this year, we identified an opportunity to strengthen how we capture and report the impact of our work. Building on the improvements we made to our performance measurement during Year 1, we are now working to capture a broader range of outcomes and better demonstrate the difference our work is making within communities.

Alongside these improvements, we are also developing an exciting collaboration with All About the Place. This will enable us to map the connections and relationships that develop through our meetings, helping us to demonstrate the wider impact of Communities That Can on the local VCSE sector and not only the connections between organisations but the partnerships, funding opportunities and joint working that ensues.

FUTURE PLANNING

During this period, we held a meeting with several stakeholders across Mid Devon who formed our CTC Advisory Board. We had a dynamic and creative meeting where many ideas were discussed and explored producing a list of possibilities for the project including: Building in time for networking for organisations where possible including drop-in opportunities (we have now set up 'Let's get Involved'); Link with current networks to resource and expand our communications and sharing of our successes; Mapping the outcomes of our networks to evidence the value of connections including partnerships created and joint funding opportunities; Enable residents to become co-designers / co-producers of the solutions needed; and Strengthen face-to-face outreach especially in rural areas; Form more partnerships (we are establishing a new Leadership Hub to commence in the autumn). The group decided that in future it would be called the CTC Co-Production group.

We are now collaborating with Paul White, Founding Director of All about the Place, to explore the development of social impact measures and network mapping. Paul has carried out an evaluation of our work to date and identified strong evidence of impact throughout, particularly around reducing social isolation, improving wellbeing, building confidence, increasing community participation, supporting volunteering, and strengthening local community capacity. Moving forward we now need to understand how many people have experienced specific changes because of taking part and which outcomes we feel would not have happened without Communities That Can. We are building on how we collect feedback, data and case studies. Our Communities that Can project is going from strength to strength and is showing longevity and we now need to ensure that we demonstrate its wider value.

