

# Community Works in Adur & Worthing

A Reflection on Impact (2016 – 2025)



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## Foreword

This report marks the significant change of our commissioned work in Adur & Worthing, a nine-year partnership with Adur and Worthing Councils that has strengthened local charities, supported grassroots action, and helped communities navigate immense change.

We write this, not only to reflect on what's ending, but to honour what continues. While our formal contract with Adur and Worthing Councils ends in June 2025, a reduced advice and support service will remain in place, funded by West Sussex County Council and our infrastructure neighbours — and we will retain key membership benefits to ensure community groups continue to have access to essential tools and connections.

We know this may feel confusing. You may still see our name and hear from us, but the full programme of support we've offered is drawing to a close. What remains is a lighter, but no less committed, touch.

This is not goodbye; it's a pivot. We remain connected to the Adur & Worthing community, and as the landscape shifts with upcoming devolution, we're ready to listen, respond, and support again where we're needed.

With thanks and with hope for what's next,

**The Community Works Team**

## Executive Summary

Over the past nine years, Community Works has had the privilege of supporting the vibrant and resilient voluntary and community sector in Adur and Worthing. Commissioned by Adur & Worthing Councils and West Sussex County Council in 2016, our role was to offer guidance, build connections, strengthen networks, and help local charities, community groups and social enterprises thrive.

From our early work in network building and capacity development, we grew into a trusted partner and a key piece of the local infrastructure, supporting over 350 organisations. We've provided one-to-one expert advice, convened strategic and grassroots networks, enabled access to funding and resources, and played a behind-the-scenes role in helping the sector navigate times of both crisis and change.

This report does more than chart activities. It is a reflection on what it takes to sustain community-led action, trust, consistency, expertise, and infrastructure support that is curious, collaborative, and rooted in shared values. The examples shared here speak to a collective commitment to place-based working: where services are shaped by those who use them, and where communities are empowered to lead.

We are proud to have walked alongside our local VCSE sector as it responded with creativity and courage to challenges from pandemic response to food insecurity, from youth voice to community climate action. The scale of activity and innovation speaks to the strength of what's possible when infrastructure support is done well and driven locally.

As we prepare to conclude our Adur & Worthing Council's commissioned role in June 2025, we extend sincere thanks to Adur & Worthing Councils for their support over the last nine years. We also recognise the significant contributions of our local partners, funders, and, most of all, the community groups we've been privileged to serve.

Though this commission is ending, the systems, skills and networks co-created through this partnership continue. Thanks to investment from West Sussex County Council and collaboration with our peer organisations across West Sussex, a lighter-touch support offer remains in place planting seeds for future growth once again.

This report is both a celebration and a statement of intent: that infrastructure matters, that trust takes time, and that communities thrive when they are supported from the inside out.

Jess Sumner

**Chief Executive, Community Works / Trustee and Co-Vice Chair, NAVCA**

## Our Journey Through Time

Since 2016, Community Works has evolved its offer to respond dynamically to the changing needs of the local VCSE sector. We've grown from providing core development support to becoming a strategic partner in community-led solutions.

- **Early Years (2016-2019):** Membership grew year on year from 28 to 143 organisations, eventually resulting in supporting 350 groups. We established networks, volunteer coordination forums, and face-to-face training events, embedding a culture of peer support and shared learning. Our offer adapted to meeting needs in governance, funding, volunteer management and health partnership working. We delivered shared conferences, started to build the Network, and designed bespoke training and events meeting sector need.
- **Pandemic Response (2020,2021):** We pivoted rapidly to providing digital delivery, supporting groups through unprecedented challenges. Our work during this time was about keeping the sector connected and supported as demand and complexity escalated. It was also the beginning of our coordinated response to food insecurity. The Emergency Food Network (EFN) was born out of the urgent need to get food to those most impacted. It became the backbone of a wider food response, which would go on to support thousands of residents through collaborative, community-driven food access initiatives. This also laid the foundations for the Adur and Worthing Food Partnership.
- **Recovery and Resilience (2022,2025):** From the cost-of-living crisis to the impact of the Russian war on Ukraine, we've acted as a hub of innovation and solidarity. Our response to the displacement of Ukrainian residents included dedicated staffing, new networks and supported access to housing, education and employment. It also amplified Ukrainian voices through events, exhibitions and advocacy. We strengthened our brand and committed to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and climate impact journeys to better support the sector. Our health role supported groups to tackle health inequalities and enable representation of the sector through significant NHS redesign. We championed better spaces for the sector and led research into local need. We became leaders in food insecurity and innovators in the digital space. Our networks trebled in size, and we worked collaboratively together to make things better.

Reflections from staff describe this journey as one of courage, creativity and community:

*“There were moments when it felt like the pressure would never stop — a pandemic, a war, the cost-of-living crisis. And yet, somehow, local groups kept adapting. They evolved quickly, often with limited resources and little recognition, but they did it anyway. It wasn't easy but they stayed in it, stayed with their communities, and found new ways forward — and we stayed with them.”*

## Impact in Numbers

### Impact and Legacy

#### Yearly

- 350+ groups supported
- 450+ advice sessions delivered
- £2M+ funding attracted
- 100 events reaching thousands

#### Return on Investment

- £25 returned for every £1 invested
- £7.2M+ secured for local groups



### *Why This Work Mattered*

- It reduced duplication, built trust, and enabled faster, more coordinated responses.
- It increased funding brought into Adur & Worthing by over £7m.
- It unlocked community-led solutions on refugee support, food, health, youth and climate.
- It held a safe space for marginalised groups and leaders.
- It built confidence, capacity, and connection across 350+ groups.

Infrastructure support is often invisible, but its impact is tangible. By strengthening the skills, confidence and connections of 350+ groups, we've enabled frontline delivery at scale from food support and mental health services to refugee support and climate action. Our role has reduced duplication, improved access to funding, and helped partners respond quickly and cohesively in times of crisis.

## Transforming Communities – Our Stories

### *Advice and Support, The Heartbeat of Community Support*

At the core of everything Community Works delivers is our Advice and Support service, a quiet powerhouse that enables the rest of our work to thrive. While events and networks often steal the spotlight, it is this one-to-one, behind-the-scenes support that serves as the first port of call for so many of our members.

Between March 2024 and March 2025 alone, we delivered over **427 unique advice interventions**. Confidential, expert responses to real time needs faced by local charities, social enterprises, and grassroots organisations. These ranged from urgent governance queries and safeguarding dilemmas to long-term strategic planning, financial oversight, and trustee training. This service is led by skilled professionals who ensure organisations are compliant, confident, and resilient.

What makes this work so vital is not just the expertise, it's the listening. Every interaction informs the design of our wider programme. When multiple groups raise the same concern, we build training. When gaps appear across sectors, we create networks.

The advice service is how we stay close to the community pulse, responding in real-time and with care. Without this foundational support, many groups would struggle to navigate complex decisions and shifting funding and policy landscapes. Some issues particularly around governance, legal risk or safeguarding require private, tailored, and trusted conversations. Our team holds that space with compassion and clarity.

Our members say it best:

“Without their recent support we would not have known how to access funding to expand our organisation... All the team go above and beyond.”

***Sharon and Lucy, West Tarring Young People's Hub***

“Their insightful, common-sense guidance has been invaluable... Community Works isn't just a service provider; they are one of the most vital heartbeats in our community.”

***Dan Flanagan, Dad La Soul***

This service is not just helpful, it is transformational. It also provides the safest space for the most marginalised voices in our community, those whose experiences are too complex, too painful, or too unsupported to be shared in large group settings. Here, emerging groups and underrepresented leaders are met with respect, understanding, and a pathway to confidence. It is the root system from which our networks, partnerships, and innovations grow.



## Case Study: Supporting a new charity working with Boys at risk of exclusion and harm



This small, volunteer-led charity supports boys and young men aged 10–18 to avoid school exclusion, improve mental health, and reduce risks such as gang involvement and crime. Founded in 2019 by a retired social worker and family therapist, the charity has grown steadily – from an idea with a couple of contacts, to a constituted group, and now a registered charity – with Community Works by their side throughout that journey.

We adapted our support to the founder’s reflective learning style, offering a mix of advice, coaching, and practical resources. As a typical ‘hands-on’ grassroots charity – where trustees also deliver frontline work – our guidance helped them stay safe, focused, and sustainable.

Over time, our support has included advising on and supporting the organisation to navigate safeguarding outside statutory systems and appoint a safeguarding trustee; decide whether to join another organisation or set up independently; explore different legal structures and register as a CIO; define referral routes and clarify the charity’s core offer, focusing on transition from primary to secondary school; connect with other organisations tackling similar issues, including county lines; support development of mentoring procedures, induction processes and internal communication; capture ethos and values in practical ways to shape the culture of the charity; help to articulate a 10-year vision and move beyond the ‘ideas’ phase to implementation, and review and formalise volunteer roles and responsibilities.

When progress stalled, we introduced the SPARK model for innovation from Brighton University, which helped the team shift from idea generation to action. This led to the appointment of a secretary to support system development and ensure the charity could grow at a manageable pace.

The charity chose a slow, intentional path, working with small numbers while building strong foundations. It’s a model of grassroots leadership: values-driven, reflective, and deeply committed to doing things well.

*“You enable me to understand more of the less obvious aspects of the project... I honestly don’t think we’d have got this far without your support.” – **Trustee of the charity***



## Volunteering

Volunteering remains at the heart of community action in Adur and Worthing. Over the past year, through our Volunteer Centre, we've supported over 230 new volunteers, listed 120+ opportunities, and helped match skilled individuals to causes that matter — from trustee roles to frontline support.

We've been a visible and active presence at Job Centres, public events and youth programmes, offering one-to-one advice, promoting opportunities, and running training for volunteer managers. Our monthly vacancy bulletin and digital platform continue to be vital tools for connecting residents to roles, while our Volunteer Coordinators Forum has created a supportive space to tackle sector challenges — from digital exclusion to inclusive recruitment. We advocate and promote best practice around volunteering and actively celebrate National Volunteers week.

Groups tell us our support is “indispensable,” “approachable,” and “game-changing”— not just in helping them recruit, but in giving them confidence, tools, and peer learning when navigating difficult issues. Volunteer recruitment isn't a noticeboard exercise — it's about connection, support, and long-term engagement.

### Case Study: Strengthening Volunteer Teams

A local charity supporting bereaved families turned to Community Works to strengthen their volunteer team. We supported the development of key roles — including a Volunteer Coordinator and Vice-Chair — and promoted multiple opportunities through our platform. This practical support helped them grow their reach and build a more resilient volunteer structure.



“We often use them as a sounding board... their impartial, practical and considerably knowledgeable support is invaluable.”

***Pauline Cory, Transition Town Worthing***

### ***The Power of Expertise - Our Expert Sessions***

Our approach to support has always started with listening: understanding what groups are really facing, and responding with tools, insight and guidance that are practical and relevant. Our Expert Sessions were shaped by what organisations told us they needed — timely, focused support on the issues that mattered most.

Each session offered space for shared learning, practical advice and peer connection. From fundraising and governance to social media, safeguarding and impact measurement, these sessions helped strengthen core skills while staying rooted in community-led design.

Topics ranged from social media strategy to payroll compliance and grant readiness. Many of these organisations would never have afforded this support independently. This programme showed how tailored professional guidance and support builds confidence and creates long-term change. We worked with experts such as National Lottery, Shake it up Creative, Fresh Egg, Seatown Accountants, Social Performance Solutions and many others.

For our social media and accountancy Expert Sessions offer (May 2023 - April 2025), we delivered 46 half-day bookable sessions. These free sessions, worth nearly £15,000 in professional time, supported 198 individuals from community organisations. During the lifetime of this programme our accountant supported 112 groups.

### **Case Study: Social Media Support for Small Groups**

One local group that supports adults with additional needs struggled to maintain a social media presence. Through the Expert Sessions, they accessed tailored advice from a digital consultant who helped them streamline content planning and improve engagement. As a result, they reported reaching new audiences and attracting fresh interest from volunteers and funders. Feedback on these sessions was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of respondents reporting a tangible impact — whether it was reassurance on finance decisions, increased confidence with digital tools, or clearer volunteer roles.



## ***Holding the Space: The Quiet Power of Our Networks***

"Community Works perform a unique and essential role... one of the most vital things they do is connect and represent so many disparate and often siloed groups... Without it, the effects would be huge."

***Richard Manders, Adur & Worthing Trust***

One the most vital pieces of work we've held, has been the convening of dedicated, consistent spaces for people working in children and young people's services, health and wellbeing, Ukraine support and housing. These networks weren't about duplication or discussion for its own sake. They were about creating space to stop, think, and face shared challenges together.

### ***Children and Young People's Network***

We invested in young people's futures and the organisations supporting them by connecting and amplifying their voices through the Children and Young People's Network. This wasn't top-down programming; it was shaped in partnership with groups like Esteem, Electric Storm Youth and The Sid Youth.

In the last 18 months, we've held three major network events, engaging over 80 organisations to explore a range of topics including:

- Youth democracy and representation
- Safe spaces and inclusion
- Power and leadership
- Co-creation in programme design
- System change and how young people influence it

From interactive workshops on power mapping to showcasing youth-led best practice, these events didn't just talk about youth inclusion; they modeled it. Participants built action plans, developed partnerships, and fed directly into strategic conversations with funders and local authorities.

"The success of the Children and Young People Network demonstrates the power of genuine co-creation and partnership. We've created a vibrant community of practice that strengthened services and support for young people."

***CYP Network Impact Report***

Over the years, the Children and Young People's Network has brought together organisations on 16 different occasions, working with some of the most at-risk, overlooked, and promising young people in our communities. Whether running youth centres, delivering outreach, supporting families, or trying to reach those on the edge of services, these groups face rising demand, shrinking funding, and increasingly complex needs.

Each theme emerged from real issues: the gap between young people and power, the need for trauma-informed spaces, the urgency of youth voice, and the hard work of navigating safeguarding with care and confidence. Sessions were designed in collaboration with the Youth Organisations identifying need. Through this work, we built a collaborative infrastructure that helped unlock funding, deepen partnerships, and put young people in the lead. We supported the development of new youth work for example, Dad La Soul, Audio Active, Pendragon and the 50 Things Project, championed youth-led design in future community spaces and created a culture where frontline youth workers and young leaders alike felt seen, respected, and valued.

Groups repeatedly told us this was one of the only spaces where they could reflect, challenge, and plan strategically.

### **Case Study: Wider Perspective and Learning**

At the Spring 2024 CYP Network, youth worker and researcher Luke Billingham from Hackney Quest brought national insight to local practice, sharing ideas on youth democracy, ethical engagement and power-sharing. The session prompted honest reflection among local organisations about how power operates in their work with young people and with local area partners. Several groups used the learning to reshape how they involve young people in planning and decision-making, sparking renewed ambition for youth-led approaches across the area.



## ***Health and Wellbeing Network***

Over the years, Community Works has supported stronger collaboration across the health and wellbeing landscape in Adur and Worthing. Through our Health and Wellbeing Network and active involvement in the Local Community Network (LCN), we've helped community groups and statutory partners connect, reflect, and act together.

Over the last two years, our Health and Wellbeing Network has brought together 196 individuals from 76 organisations to share knowledge, spark partnerships, and respond to pressing local health needs. These sessions offered a safe, collaborative space for statutory services, health professionals, and VCSE groups to come together and make progress on shared goals, from addressing mental health challenges to building more inclusive services. Groups were given time to share their work, hear from others, and find ways to work together more effectively.

In Spring 2024, we hosted a network event at Brooklands Park, shaped by member organisations including Pollinator Pioneers, Cycall and The Wellderness. It was a reminder of the value of the fresh air movement and shared experience in supporting wellbeing. This network shared the findings from the 2024 *People and Nature Survey for England*, which reported that 92% of adults agreed that spending time outdoors was good for their physical health, and 89% agreed it was beneficial for their mental health.

Alongside this, our role in the Local Community Network (LCN) helped ensure community voice influenced strategic health and care conversations. We supported the redesign of the LCN structure, improved safeguarding pathways, and helped establish the Housing Network, now hosted by Worthing Homes. We also strengthened links between community groups and NHS partners on issues including mental health, breast cancer screening and social prescribing.

The Health and Wellbeing Network and the LCN were distinct but connected. One focused on relationships and peer learning, the other on influence and decision-making. Together they demonstrated the value of a joined-up, community-rooted approach led by trusted relationships and shared purpose.

### **Case Study: Networks that Nurture Change**

One of the most successful examples was the Spring 2024 Nature and Wellbeing Network event, hosted outdoors in Brooklands Park with 46 participants from 28 organisations. The event, co-produced with The Wellderness, Cycall and Pollinator Pioneers, blended mindfulness, environmental education and shared learning. As a direct result, The Wellderness began hosting regular wellbeing sessions in the community garden space.



### ***Supporting Community-led Peer to Peer Networks***

Alongside our formal networks in areas like Health and CYP, we've quietly supported the many community-led networks that shape Adur and Worthing. These aren't our networks — they're locally driven, rooted in place, and powered by passionate organisations and residents. But we've been part of their fabric: a steady presence offering advice, advocacy and practical help when it was needed most.

We've helped these groups stay strong and independent — guiding on governance, fundraising, volunteering, and collaboration. Our role wasn't to lead, but to enable. From unblocking issues to connecting the right people, we've worked behind the scenes to shape the conditions for success.

Over the years, we've supported a wide range of grassroots networks, including Green Tides, the Fundraisers Network, Shoreham Summit, Heritage Alliance, Arts Forum, Worthing Festival, the Older People's Network, Worthing Heritage Alliance, West Sussex Links, and the Community Centres Association. Each has tackled important themes — from climate action and local identity to cultural access, ageing well, and strategic collaboration.

The outputs — heritage trails, festivals, forums and charters — belong to the networks themselves. But we're proud to have helped make them possible. Our backing meant groups stayed connected, confident, and better equipped to meet local needs.

## ***Space - Places with Purpose***

Our work on space has been about more than just bricks and mortar; it's been about voice, value, and visibility. Over eighteen months, we listened to and learned from local groups about the opportunities and challenges of finding and managing effective, inclusive, and financially sustainable community spaces.

This resulted in 'SPACE: A Community Conversation', a project that brought together the voluntary sector, local businesses, funders, developers, and planners. From field visits to Bognor Makerspace, Chichester Development Trust and Folkestone's F51 Centre to practical workshops and shared resources, we created an ecosystem of learning and possibility. We offered access to discounted and free spaces, connected groups to local agents and ethical property experts, and supported interim solutions for groups like SHOUT Café, CREW and Broadwater Support Group.

We also championed the idea that beautiful, well designed community spaces inspire confidence, reduce isolation, and build pride. Community groups deserve better than 'meanwhile space' and make do environments. Good space design is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

As part of this, we forged new relationships with planning officers, local architects, and housing developers, advocating for earlier, deeper community involvement in shaping physical space.

And this listening didn't stop at physical spaces — it fed into our programming. In 2024, we hosted a Children and Young People Network focused on young people's right to be included in planning conversations and design processes. It gave youth workers and young people themselves a platform to share what space means to them: safe places to gather, express, and belong.

What this programme showed, more than anything, is that community space is a shared ambition, one that must be built through partnership. It takes planners, funders, architects, community leaders, volunteers, and residents working together to get it right. Beautiful, inclusive spaces don't happen by accident; they emerge from deep listening, collaborative design, and shared commitment. We're proud to have played a role in convening those conversations and ensuring community voices were at the heart of them.



### **Case study: Inspiring Spaces**

In February 2023, Community Works facilitated a field visit to Chichester Development Trust, where VCSE groups toured converted community buildings like The Chapel and The Water Tower. Led by Director Clare de Bathe, the visit highlighted the role of community partnerships in reclaiming and repurposing heritage sites. Attendees gained insight into governance, funding, and creating beautiful, inclusive spaces rooted in local need – valuable learning for organisations exploring how to secure and manage their own community venues.



### ***Digital: Smart Connections and Digital Confidence***

Strong, purposeful relationships with expert partners Plinth and Fresh Egg have shaped our digital work. Initially, we piloted support with local organisations, gathering feedback about what the VCSE sector needed most, especially as many groups faced barriers to digital transformation, including limited capacity, ageing volunteer bases, resource gaps, burnout, and hesitation around new technologies. This groundwork culminated in the launch of our AI and Digital Network in 2024, attended by over 100 local community leaders. The event offered real-world insights into the future of digital engagement. It helped organisations reflect on how to apply new tools in a way that matched their missions and capacity.

Alongside this, we delivered a series of tailored workshops in partnership with Plinth and Fresh Egg, covering AI readiness, audience segmentation, storytelling through data, digital strategy, and automated grant searches. These workshops were free, accessible, and designed specifically for the voluntary and community sector.

To complement this learning, we informed, secured and distributed free access to the CharityWise learning hub for over 150 local users. This resource continues to support charities and social

enterprises in developing digital confidence, upskilling staff and volunteers, and navigating a changing digital world. It remains a legacy for groups on their digital journeys.

Our representation on the West Sussex Digital Inclusion, Access and Safety Partnership allowed us to learn from others and share our connections across the area. The partnership ensures increased ability, empowerment, and inclusion. It also means that no organisation is left behind in a digitally driven future, which at times moves quicker than the abilities of a sector challenged by resources, skills, and capacity.

### **Case Study: Smart Connections, the Potential of AI and Digital**

In Spring 2025, Community Works convened over 100 organisations at Rooms in Worthing for a dedicated AI and Digital Network event. The session explored how charities and community groups might harness emerging digital tools, from AI to Community CRMs, to enhance their work. Co-designed with local and national partners, it balanced inspiration with realism, recognising the resource pressures, digital exclusion, and ethical dilemmas facing the sector. Attendees valued the chance to explore innovation together in a supportive and honest environment.



## Case Study: The Power of Film

Our digital programme also highlighted the need for groups to be better equipped with filmmaking skills, so we ran a two day course. The course was delivered by a local university lecturer and aimed to teach groups how to create short films on a smartphone. We then met with filmmakers and local organisations who could speak to the power of film in promoting their organisation, in particular with a national suicide organisation with roots in Adur and Worthing. This resulted in our sellout evening event 'Love & Light', which showcased local groups, their films and the filmmakers who worked with them. Over 150 people attended an incredibly special evening that demonstrated the power of film.



## *Strengthening our Food System: from Emergency Response to Community Leadership*

Over the past five years, our food-related work has evolved from an urgent crisis response into a sustained, collaborative push for system-wide change. In the early days of the pandemic, we established the **Emergency Food Network (EFN)**, bringing together 14 frontline food providers across Adur and Worthing. These regular network meetings fostered mutual support, knowledge exchange, and a more coordinated approach to food insecurity.

What began as emergency provision, soon developed into a network committed to dignity, sustainability, and local solutions. With support from Community Works, the EFN transitioned from mostly referral-only food banks to several holistic community hubs offering wraparound support. We supported training in volunteer management, digital tools, fundraising, and food safety. This provided ongoing support and inspiration to food banks, providing food for over a thousand residents every week. Our advocacy ensured essential Household Support Funding was shared proportionally with the food banks, raised essential winter funding and made sure that, where possible, funding was used for direct food provision, which is their most pressing need. We also ensured the West Sussex UK Harvest Food Pilot operated in Worthing.

In collaboration with the University of Brighton, we co-authored pivotal research exploring the link between hunger, trauma, and dignity, which directly contributed to the founding of the [Alliance for Dignified Food Support](#), a national movement now championing systemic change in food aid delivery. This locally rooted but system-aware work led to the formation of the Adur & Worthing Food Partnership. Community Works played a core convening role, bringing together community leaders, food providers, residents, and local government to co-design a Food Charter and Food Plan, aligned with national best practice and community priorities. These documents provide a shared vision for a fairer, more resilient food system in our coastal communities.

In 2024, the Partnership formally transitioned into a Community Interest Company (CIC) led by residents. Community Works supported the design of this transition and laid the groundwork for future sustainability, including a Lottery bid for long term funding and official membership of [Sustainable Food Places](#). The Partnership also now sits within the wider West Sussex Food Network, strengthening connections across the county, amplifying local voices in strategic conversations and influencing policy. What started as a response to emergency hunger has become one of our strongest legacies, a community-powered food movement grounded in dignity, equity, and long-term systems change.

### **Case Study: Emergency Food Evolution**

After hearing from the Moulsecoomb Community Supermarket at an Emergency Food Network meeting, some members were inspired to broaden their own offer. Several local food banks, including Broadwater Support Group, Worthing Soup Kitchen, Worthing Food Foundation, Community House and Gateway Hub, have since expanded their services. Many now provide school uniforms, pet food, baby supplies, IT training, debt advice and employment support — reflecting a shift from emergency provision toward more holistic, dignity-led models of community support.



As part of the Adur - Food Partnership Forum, I would like to express how noticeable it has been that Community Works have held and steered the work for many member groups to develop and significantly grow, over the past three years.

Post Covid, it was realised that resources to provide a place where food was simply given away, would be unsustainable going forward. Many groups have worked hard to develop and experiment with alternative methods of working towards financial sustainability. Some have secured premises, or, developed larger premises, some are innovating with providing basic shop foodstuff at cost price, (but close to where people live), and some are experimenting with cash donations in return for food.

Others are trialling community Café's, developing Soup Kitchens, but, almost all are working alongside the need for development of user social opportunities, benefit support, debt management and the improvement of client mental wellbeing, rather than simply the provision of food.

This is a noticeable and marked development from the humble beginnings of the Forum, just three years ago.

**Sue Barnes Partnership Officer, WSCC June 2024**

### ***Ukraine Response, Connection, Culture, and Community Resilience***

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Adur and Worthing has welcomed hundreds of displaced Ukrainian residents. Community Works, alongside Worthing 4 Refugees and Adur Ukraine Support Association, has played a central role in ensuring those arriving were not only supported with essentials, housing, education, and employment, but also had meaningful opportunities to connect, contribute, and heal.

For over three years, we've worked alongside the Ukrainian community in Adur and Worthing to tackle some of the most urgent and complex challenges, from employment and housing to trauma and education. Our partnership has helped individuals move from hosting arrangements into private rental housing. It has also supported families navigating the British education system and actively worked to improve employment opportunities through skills sessions, training, education, and one-to-one support.

Alongside this, Community Works supported the coordination of a major event marking the 3rd anniversary of the invasion, hosted at Worthing Museum in February 2025. Over 100 people came together in remembrance and solidarity. Speeches from local leaders, a moment of silence, and community networking created a space for grief, gratitude, and hope. The event reinforced a message that the Ukrainian community is not alone and that Worthing stands with them.

We led and worked in collaboration with the Adur and Worthing Ukraine Partnership, and over 30 local organisations to support work in education, employment, mental health and integration.

Other impactful initiatives included the Over 55's Club supporting older Ukrainians through an active programme of activities. On behalf of Ukrainians, we also raised Visa issues at parliamentary level and worked with national organisations to support the e-visa scheme.

These cultural initiatives were more than symbolic; they enabled local people and newcomers to share space, build empathy, and express resilience in the face of trauma. As the Ukraine Support Project concludes, these shared experiences have laid foundations for ongoing community integration and inclusion.

### **Case Study: Faces of Resilience Exhibition**

Embedded in her community, our Ukrainian coordinator curated a powerful cultural and mental health project titled *Faces of Resilience*. Hosted at Worthing Museum and later toured across West Sussex, the project blended portraiture with themes of trauma recovery and advocacy. It not only celebrated the rich culture of our Ukrainian neighbours but also confronted the stark realities of their ongoing challenges.



"We have benefitted greatly from all the links that Community Works has across the voluntary, business and government sectors... Thank you."

***Gay Jacklin, Worthing 4 Refugees***



## Climate Action

In October 2023, Community Works co-hosted the “*Working Together to Reach Net Zero*” Community Conference alongside Climate Resilience Centre Worthing (CREW), Transition Town Worthing, and Green Tides. The event brought together over **150 delegates** from local businesses, VCSE organisations, and public sector partners.

Designed collaboratively and funded by Community Works, the day featured expert speakers including sustainability leaders such as Sam Zindel, Managing Director of Propellernet; Pooran Desai, Founder of One Planet; and Paul Brewer, Director of Sustainability & Resources at Adur & Worthing Councils and Advisor in Local Government at Sussex Bay. Workshops explored sustainable business practice, energy flexibility, and practical steps toward net zero. Local organisations also exhibited, from Tree Action UK to The Big Listen.

The conference **bridged the gap between community and business action on climate change**, equipping attendees with tools, insights and networks to fuel their environmental efforts. It was a clear demonstration of how Community Works can convene diverse voices and turn collaboration into practical change.

Following the 2023 Net Zero Community Conference, we took our own climate commitments further by working towards formal accreditation. In 2024, Community Works proudly achieved the **Investors in the Environment Bronze Award**, recognising our efforts to reduce environmental impact, improve sustainability practices, and model the change we want to see in our sector.

### Case Study: Investors in the Environment

To achieve the iE accreditation Community Works appointed a green champion, developed our environmental policy, measured resource usage, set performance targets, calculated our carbon footprint and created action, waste management and communications plans. This then enabled us to support other organisations on their environmental journeys.





"Knowing that we have Community Works to call on whenever we need them is such a bonus... They were incredibly supportive of our Community Climate Conference last year. To be honest, I don't think it would have happened without their back up, expertise in running events like this, and their unfailing support."

***Pauline Cory, Transition Town Worthing***

### ***Sompting Big Local — A Community-Led Legacy***

For 13 years, Sompting Big Local proved that when local people are trusted to lead, extraordinary things happen. With £1.2 million in resident directed funding, Sompting transformed from a place where many felt unheard, into a vibrant, confident, and connected community. Community Works oversaw the project and acted as the locally trusted organisation providing support when it was needed and stepping back when it wasn't.

The Sompting Big Local Hub became the beating heart of this work, hosting over 25 local groups, from knitting circles to wellbeing drop ins. Regular cafes, craft sessions and support groups offered connection and purpose. As one visitor shared, "Having Connect Café has helped me feel a part of something." Another resident said of the Mummy Shock programme, "This course has been a godsend. I've suffered with social anxiety my whole life, but I found the confidence to speak up, to connect, and to feel like I'm not out there on my own."

#### **Case Study: Reducing Isolation and Enabling Access**

Over 7,500 passenger journeys were taken on the Sompting minibus, reducing isolation and enabling access to everything from hospital appointments to community events. When the service ended, the vehicle was passed to Sid Youth to continue its community role with a small fund, a lasting legacy of mobility and inclusion.



Youth was a particular focus. With funding from Sompting Big Local, young people benefited from mentoring, mental health interventions, and safe spaces like The Drop. In 2024, an emergency counselling provision funded through Electric Storm Youth may have saved lives. Schools praised the immediate impact, especially those failed by statutory services.

Residents also took the lead on wellbeing. The Sompting Singalong, run by volunteers Roger and Sheila, supported over 1,400 engagements and generated more than £360,000 in social value by reducing loneliness and boosting belonging. Meanwhile, Mummy Shock helped new mothers rebuild confidence after childbirth, offering empathy and connection at a time of deep vulnerability.

Sompting Big Local also invested in the physical environment, creating play parks, funding a new modular toilet block, and bringing wildflowers, benches, and outdoor art to public spaces. Over £250,000 was invested in green infrastructure alone, delivering an estimated £1.75 million in wellbeing benefit.

As the project concludes, the legacy lives on — a community that feels empowered, connected and proud. As one member of the partnership put it, “What stands out most is the growth in confidence, pride, and participation among residents. Many who once felt unheard now engage with local issues, challenge decisions, and take pride in their role as changemakers. That’s the legacy we’re most proud of, not just the parks, projects, or equipment, but the people who now feel empowered to shape the place they call home.”

“A key part of our ability to overcome challenges and deliver effectively was the support we received from Community Works, who served as our locally trusted organisation (LTO) for eight years. Their governance, experience and financial oversight allowed us to focus on community engagement and delivery, knowing the operational side was in safe hands. They offered flexibility when we needed it, advice when we asked for it, and the space to lead in our own way. We are deeply grateful for their steady presence and trust.”

***Sompting Big Local Resident-Led Partnership***

## *CIL Funding, Unlocking Community Potential through Local Investment*

Since 2022, Community Works has played a central role in supporting the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Neighbourhood Fund in Worthing. We have worked in partnership with Adur & Worthing Councils to ensure that grassroots organisations have fair, informed access to this vital funding stream. Our support has spanned all aspects of the process, from marketing the opportunity and guiding groups through their applications, to providing professional panel chairing and post decision feedback for unsuccessful bids. We have also been instrumental in identifying barriers to access and improving support for groups who are reapplying.

In 2023, Community Works promoted, delivered and chaired round one of the Worthing CIL Fund. A total of **57 applications** were received, and **45 projects** were successfully funded, distributing **£577,260.65** in total. These projects reflected a wide range of local priorities, including initiatives tackling food poverty, enhancing green spaces, and creating safer, more inclusive spaces for young people.

In 2024, this work continued and deepened. A total of **47 applications** were received for Round 2, and **27 organisations** were successfully awarded funding. Over **£200,000** was allocated to impactful projects focused on cost-of-living support, youth initiatives, and environmental and wellbeing outcomes.

Our work included chairing the panel, offering feedback to applicants, liaising with council officers, and helping the sector navigate the complexity of funding criteria. We also supported drop-in sessions and created guidance materials to demystify the process for smaller and emerging groups.

CIL funding has enabled local groups to realise projects that might otherwise never have moved forward, from community growing schemes to youth mental health interventions. It has created tangible improvements in public spaces and unlocked energy and vision at a neighbourhood level. Our partnership with Adur and Worthing Councils ensured that money set aside for communities got to communities.

## ***Innovation at the Heart: Our Creative, Curious and Collaborative Way of Working***

At Community Works, innovation is not just a side project; it's our practice. It lives in how we listen, how we design, and how we build. It shows up in our ability to respond with imagination and care, and in our commitment to celebrating what already works while making space for what's next.

We look to the old and the bold, the tried and tested, and the new with equal respect. We know that some of the most powerful work in our communities is already happening, and that innovation often means backing what exists with fresh energy, creative tools, and the trust to do more.

In the past quarter alone, our collaborative events have welcomed over 500 residents: from the reflective, and deeply human, Love and Light Film Festival, to our Ukraine event and our Digital and AI network, which was designed and led by groups themselves. We didn't just support these events; we co-designed them with care and intention, helping them grow into something bold and generative.

Through our creative, relational approach, our innovation wasn't just structural; it was an intrinsic part of the way we built trust, widened participation, and encouraged collaboration. Our curiosity also opened up new doors, forged new relationships, and made people work in different ways. We've demonstrated that innovation isn't just about the shiny and new; it's collaborative, grounded, and shaped by people who know their places best. Our creativity has always been in support of connection, compassion, and meaningful change.

## ***A Lasting Legacy***

Our work has planted deep roots:

- The Emergency Food Network and Adur & Worthing Food Partnership will continue to function together, and we await news of a funding bid to support this work further.
- Digital resources, AI platforms and toolkits remain live and free to use.
- Our role in developing the CIL funding and increasing accessibility has resulted in a fairer, more accessible year-on-year fund.
- Trustee recruitment and year-on-year fundraising training has built lasting sector capacity.
- We have enabled more groups to access more funding themselves, leaving them better resourced.
- The Ukraine Partnership and associated cultural infrastructure now sit within wider refugee strategies.
- Practical tools and open resources, including event templates, safeguarding guides, and collaboration toolkits, are now used across the sector.

## ***Why This Work Matters***

We know our support makes a difference — because our members tell us.

They describe us as a trusted partner. A catalyst for connection. A steady presence that helps them navigate challenge and change. They say our role has helped them grow in confidence, reach more people, and build stronger relationships across the community.

They call us:

- Essential
- Supportive
- Empowering
- Invaluable
- Transformational

Their words reflect the role infrastructure plays behind the scenes: helping organisations feel less alone, more equipped and better connected to each other and to the wider system. That's what we've delivered, quietly, consistently, and with impact.

As our commissioned role draws to a close, the foundations laid by this work remain. Some networks will continue, led by their members. The Adur & Worthing Food Partnership is now a resident-led CIC who will support the Emergency Food Network. Our Ukraine support organisations will hold the support in the community. Digital tools, resources, and funding knowledge are in circulation across the sector through the support of CharityWise and Plinth. Peer-to-peer networks remain active. And we retain a lighter-touch support offer thanks to West Sussex County Council.

Much of our work during this time aligned closely with Adur & Worthing Councils' ambitions around place-based working, neighbourhood engagement and tackling systemic issues like health inequality and food insecurity. We were proud to support these goals through a community-led model offering both practical delivery and strategic insight from the sector. We hope this report helps inform future commissioning by showing the impact of that alignment in practice.

Our learning is clear: change happens when we trust local knowledge, create space and trust for collaboration, and invest in infrastructure as the backbone of strong communities. We hope this report is used not just as a reflection, but as a prompt. A reminder that the voluntary and community sector is not an 'add on'; it's a strategic partner in building healthier, fairer, more connected places. We leave with pride, with gratitude, and with deep respect for those we've worked alongside. The relationships, learning and legacy will continue to shape what comes next.

## ***With Gratitude***

To Adur and Worthing Councils, West Sussex County Council, the NHS Sussex, our grant funders, national and local partners and above all, our member organisations, thank you. This has been a partnership of purpose. We honour our brilliant staff team, whose expertise and passion made every achievement possible.

At the heart of everything we do is a belief that support works best when it's built *with* people, not *for* them. Our role has been to facilitate safe, trusted spaces where leadership can flourish, where conversations turn into collaborations, and where ideas grow into action.

We've seen that when people are supported to connect and lead together, extraordinary things happen. None of this would have been possible without the dedication, wisdom, and generosity of the voluntary and community organisations we have been privileged to work alongside. You've shown up in times of crisis, in moments of change, and in hope for the future. Thank you for letting us walk beside you, hold the space, and amplify your work. This story belongs to you as much as it does to us.

Thank you,

Jess Estcourt

**Relationships and Development Manager**  
**Adur and Worthing Community Works**