

## Partnership Works... A Case Study

### The East Sussex Volunteer Development Project

East Sussex has pioneered a project to support, encourage and develop volunteers across the county. This project has included a system to measure the number of new volunteers in the county, a database of facts and figures which monitors the trends in volunteering over the last two and a half years and an infrastructure development plan.



## The Challenge

In 2006 there were two main challenges for volunteering in East Sussex. Firstly, despite all the known benefits of volunteering, there was no consistent countywide information on volunteering, limiting the ability to show the contribution volunteers make to the communities of East Sussex. The second challenge was how to provide the most appropriate support and development opportunities for these individuals and the organisations that work with volunteers.

Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE) completed a study in 2005 that showed that 1 in 11 people in the South East actively volunteer. Since no local information was available, this figure was taken as the 'baseline' in East Sussex, as a county in the South East. Volunteering was approved as a key area for the original East Sussex Local Area Agreement (LAA) 2006-2009, with a target of recruiting 5190 new volunteers in the three year LAA period. Of these new volunteers, the target included 460 from hard to reach groups (people with disabilities or a limiting long-term illness, people from black or ethnic minorities, or those not in employment, education or training (NEET)) and 10% of people volunteering over 2 hours a week.

## The Action

The ambitions of the East Sussex Volunteer Development Project were:

- To encourage more people to volunteer
- To develop better support for organisations and groups working with volunteers

Firstly, a volunteer tracking system was introduced. To assist in the tracking process, volunteer involving organisations (ViOs) were encouraged to sign up to the project. Each ViO received a project toolkit, which explained the project, and included a 'Tracking Report' to be completed every six months. The request for completed tracking forms was sent to ViOs through the organisations' existing communication channels e.g. electronic news bulletins, website space and newsletters.

The volunteer data contained in the tracking reports was collated into one central database of volunteering information including breakdowns by organisation, age, ethnicity and geography.

A County Volunteering Steering Group was established in July 2006 to oversee and support the work of the Volunteer Development Project. The 11 individuals in the Steering Group represented a number of different sectors and organisations, each bringing to the table a vested interest in the future of volunteering. Alongside the Steering Group, there was also a Reference Group, made up of a much wider group of individuals to ensure that the work was representative of the county. These two groups supported and guided the work of the full-time employed project coordinator, and a volunteer assisting

as an analyst on the project one day a week. This work was supported by a vigorous campaign to promote volunteering, aimed at removing the perceived barriers to volunteering and demonstrating that anyone can volunteer. This campaign included volunteer case studies, where to find further information, local radio interviews, and printed materials displayed in public areas, as well as public events. The objective was that anybody coming into contact with the campaign would be encouraged to find out about volunteering opportunities in their local area.



The other element of the LAA volunteering target was that the Volunteer Development Project should also be working through the Change Up consortium to deliver the Infrastructure Development Plan for East Sussex. The Infrastructure Development Plan focuses on the need to develop consistent support for ViOs through the existing network of Volunteer Centres. The next phase of the project moves away from the numerical tracking data and focuses on identifying common issues, coordinating consistent support for East Sussex ViOs and volunteers, and implementing the Infrastructure Development Plan in 2010.

## The Impact

One of the most significant impacts to come out of this project has been the information now available. Having the data has meant East Sussex is now in a position to say what volunteering in the county looks like, for instance, the sheer numbers of volunteers, that the majority are young people under 25, and that there is a greater awareness of the diversity of opportunities available.

This data is vital for the future development of volunteering support, for how we talk about volunteers, how we communicate with them, and how we address the common issues for volunteering in East Sussex. And in the next few years the Infrastructure Development Plan will build on the work undertaken through the tracking process, and the relationships it has built. Volunteering organisations work better, groups are communicating more, and real headway has been made with engaging organisations that have historically been hesitant to define themselves as a voluntary group, and therefore take part in the tracking process.

In the final year of the first East Sussex Local Area Agreement, the volunteering target has been exceeded - with over 5000 new volunteers recorded across East Sussex over 3 years. The figures are an incredibly positive reflection of the communities in East Sussex, with a wealth of personal stories of how volunteering has improved the lives of individuals, whole communities, and how the promotional campaign is continuing to encourage everyone to consider volunteering

Overall, as an LAA target, this volunteering project has had an enormous impact, not only in measuring so many new volunteers, but also in investing in the future of volunteering, and its impact on other countywide priorities, such as reducing unemployment, reducing crime and creating strong communities.

Volunteering has a great role to play in improving community life in East Sussex, and its impact is only likely to increase in the current economic climate as a means of improving the delivery of services through the voluntary and community sector, helping people to overcome stress and anxiety as well as staying in good health mentally and physically, and as a route back into employment.

### Lessons Learnt:

- Be clear and concise about your objectives, particularly when communicating these to participating organisations
- Provide strong guidance to ensure that organisations are supported during the research process
- Manage expectations, such as the need for ViOs to respond regularly to tracking requests, and be honest about the ability of numerical data to

represent your area

- Be careful with the pressures placed on voluntary and community organisations when asking for regular data
- Appreciate the difference in perspectives when setting up a strategic project that involves the cooperation of voluntary organisations at all levels and of all sizes

### **Organisations Involved:**

- Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services (EAVS)
- East Sussex County Council
- South Downs Council of Voluntary Services (SDCVS)
- Vinvolved
- Sussex County Sports Partnership
- Sussex Police
- Rother Voluntary Action
- Hasting Voluntary Action
- Action in Rural Sussex
- Hastings Borough Council

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### **Further Information:**

Pride of Place is East Sussex's Sustainable Community Strategy for 2026. It sets out the long-term ambitions for the county which local organisations, from councils to community groups, are working towards for 2026.

Increasing the number of volunteers was a target from The East Sussex Local Area Agreement 1 (2006 – 2009).

For more information on what issues are being prioritised in East Sussex, please visit the East Sussex Strategic Partnership at [www.essp.org.uk](http://www.essp.org.uk)

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