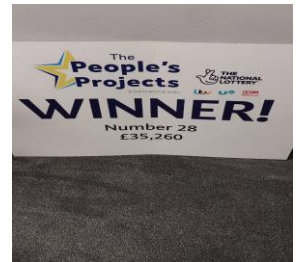




Number 28 – Bungay Community Support



Project reference: 20218750





FINAL REPORT

Written July 2024

Overview

The aim of the project funded by The People Project with effect from 1st July 2023 was for Bungay Community Support (BCS) to:

- **Develop a Community Hub**, a central base in the heart of the residential area opposite a primary school which will provide an intergenerational facility for community use throughout the year.
- **Create a Food Hall.**
- **Fund the running costs of this newly created facility** aimed to bring members of the community together to support and help each other.

It also provided BCS with a base from which to coordinate its existing services (shopping & medicine delivery to the housebound, befriending service & Baby Basics (the free provision of nappies & donated new or pre-loved baby goods)).

At the time of writing the application BCS had already secured an empty former-butchers' shop and with the help of funding from a range of charitable trusts, and with the sterling effort of a team of dedicated volunteers, was in the process of turning this venue into a welcoming community space for the residents of Bungay & surrounding area who are facing financial hardship.

Challenges

The major challenges we faced in setting up this project have been:

- **Reluctance to admit need:** One of the biggest challenges faced by this project was that despite all the national statistics showing the levels of deprivation in this area (being amongst the worst 20% of UK population) most Bungay residents failed to appreciate it, being a market town. Initial publicity about our coming services was at first treated with disbelief in general. But at the same time, there was a natural reluctance of people facing financial hardship to admit to this fact and come in to use our services.
- **Ensuring we were meeting need:** Whilst we had undertaken the research in order to submit the application, the fact that people were reluctant to be seen using the services as they did not want to others to see/assume as to their financial situation, did make us wonder if we were providing and/or promoting the services appropriately. We knew from our existing work with the housebound and those attending our existing Baby Basics services, together with the data & information we had from previous winter-time services, plus from working with East Suffolk County Council & District Council and Bungay Town Council, as well as with local churches and Social Prescribers at the medical centre, that the need existed, but we had to help people overcome their personal stigma and to seek assistance to help them move forward out of their situation. We therefore reached out to other support agencies, namely Citizens Advice, DWP Job Centre, East Suffolk Financial Inclusion Team, none of which had an existing

presence in Bungay, meaning residents had to travel a minimum of 6 miles to the nearest for support. By using Number 28 as an outreach base for each, members of the community started coming in to use their services, at the same time starting to use BCS's own services. We have recently negotiated with Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust Well-being Team that they will be using Number 28 as a clinical centre for their patients, thereby creating another key service previously unavailable in Bungay.

- Creating a welcoming place:** We have been fortunate to be able to use the space within the Community Hub in a multitude of ways. We have created a welcoming, carpeted seating/social area full of soft furnishings. Here people can sit & chat, read books, jigsaws, have refreshments. We have an activities area and small kitchen, an office space for confidential conversations, and a separate area for the Food Hall. We have created a diary of activities over the days we are open (a sample is attached), but people can just pop in for a chat & refreshments. We have recently been told by a visitor that “Number 28 is more like a community hug!”.
- Finances/sustainability:** In addition to the core funding received from The People's Lottery, BCS needs to continually seek additional funding to run projects and develop services. This is a continual headache as most grant funding will exclude core funding (salaries and/or premises costs) as eligible costs. This naturally raises great concerns over sustainability of any organisation. The level of services now being delivered by BCS volunteers, under the coordination of 3 part-time staff, together with the vital outreach services now operating in Bungay, in such a short time, is outstanding, but its success creates a bigger sustainability problem.

Differences made to community

This project has now exceeded our expectations and has had a great positive impact on the community of Bungay, in that we have already exceeded the number of people with financial hardship we predicted within a 12-month period using our service and expanded the number of support services available to members of the community locally. Previously they would have had to travel a minimum of 6 miles for this advice, or not at all due to travel costs.

Our monitoring records show that since opening Number 28 officially in July 2023, over the 3 ½ days per week we open, that:

| | |
|---|---|
| Overall footfall | 2,571 |
| Medicines/shopping deliveries to housebound | 780 |
| Food Hall - shoppers | 32 (representing 82 people, 55% children) |
| Food Hall - waiting list | 24 (representing 38 people) |
| Baby Basics visitors | 276 |
| Understanding IT (6 months only) | 52 clients |

When the application was submitted it had been anticipated to merge the Bungay Food Bank and the BCS Food Hall onto the one site. However, due to the differing ethos of the two providers it was agreed to keep the 2 services separate, with the progression from the Food Bank (and its emergency handouts) to the Food Hall (where for a small sum, customers select

the range of healthy foods they can take home) is a major improvement in a person's feeling of self-worth as the stigma of having food handouts is removed.

We feel the success of the Food Hall project is the non-judgemental atmosphere and respect with which customers are treated. The very fact customers are able to come into a Community Hub open space which has many activities taking place takes away the stigma of relying on food handouts. The fact that they are able to enjoy a shopping experience similar to that of a supermarket, where they can make their own choices from what is available, improves their self-worth. The fact that the cost of their shopping basket is low (by paying a small amount each week entitles them to select from a wide range of meat/cheese/milk/bread & ambient products to the value of up to six times what they paid – plus free sanitary products & pet food) enables them to have extra money each week to pay for other things. An open supply of a range of fresh fruit & vegetables (free of charge, much donated during seasonal surpluses) is available to all shoppers encouraging healthy eating. Friendships have been made with other shoppers over cups of free coffee & refreshments & children's activities available, again removing a sense of social isolation many feel due to their financial hardship. Conversations between the shoppers together and with our trained volunteers has improved the well-being of many.

The quality service provided by BCS Food Hall has been recognised across Suffolk Food Network as a model of good practice.

We have many case studies of how people's lives have improved, mainly from mothers pleased to be able to provide predominantly healthy food for their families, using menu suggestions from volunteers. Whilst many of the customers are long-term, several have used this service for a limited time whilst finances were at their lowest.

Currently the Food Hall is only open to customers one day per week, but with continued funding, it will be opening a second day starting September 2024 to deal with numbers of customers with financial needs.

The Community Hub is developing into a major activity centre, but equally a place where members of the community feel at ease to come & chat, thereby avoiding social isolation and improving well-being. However, staff & volunteers are always looking at the activities on offer. One example is that Bungay has lost all financial outlets, other than an ATM & small post office/general shop, yet a very large percentage of the population of Bungay are aged 65+, who, together with others are affected by digital poverty. BCS successfully gained funding to run an "Understanding IT" session ½ day per week, where a member of staff explains the basics of laptops/tablets/mobile phones/on-line banking/identifying scams etc, all following our strict Privacy Policy, according to individual queries. This is enabling predominantly older people to be part of the new IT field of transactions, and communication with families etc.

The other difference the Food Hall & Number 28 Community hub in general has made to the community is that it has raised awareness of the level of financial hardship in Bungay across the overall population and more importantly there is a single place that members of the community can visit and that can help.

The fact that we offer a wrap-around support service alongside the Food Hall has had an equal impact on the improvement of our customers lives. Citizens Advice use Number 28 as an

outreach base on a Tuesday morning, coinciding with the Food Hall, whilst East Suffolk Financial Inclusion Team attend on a Thursday. Food Hall customers are encouraged to use both services to maximise financial income & other support. It is anticipated that all customers using the Food Hall for 12 months will have a formal interview arranged with these services to make sure they are getting all the support they can or whether things have changed during the year. Reports from CAES show that since July 23, they have seen 75 clients (many Food Hall customers) dealing with 935 issues. One quarter of these queries have been about benefits, closely followed by debt management & housing. They report a total of £61,196 in income increase by their clients, with £64,065 debts written off. Without these teams being based at Number 28 it is highly unlikely that these clients would have made the journey to the nearest offices and would not have received these additional financial benefits.

Successes (case studies)

Stan was one of the first to visit us when we opened our new community hub to sit and chat with our volunteers and staff, taking great notice in how we were creating our Food Hall. Becoming a member, he asked a lot of questions about cooking the food items he purchased. His late wife did all the cooking and at the time of joining the Food Hall, Stan only warmed up tinned food.

In his own words:

“I’ve lived in Bungay all my life in the old part of town. People think my house is a character, but I haven’t done anything to it in years. My wife always nagged me to put in heating or new windows but I never got around to it. It’s therefore cold in winter and draughty all year. But I make do with it as I do like the old place. I’ve never had a lot of money, but we made do. But the increasing prices at the end of last year were more than I could take. I couldn’t afford 3 meals a day & to keep the house warm, so I started coming to the Number 28 project during the day. It was good to get out, keep warm and meet with others.

They’re a good bunch of people, always cheerful and helpful. So, when I heard they were opening a Food Hall I thought I’d have a look. I’ve used this a few times now. I pay a small amount of money and can choose from a wide range of food stuffs. They have a good variety – donated fruit & vegetables are free. They even give out recipe cards with ideas on how to cook cheap meals with items I get from them. The money I save goes towards my heating bills, so I am a lot happier. I understand they also have people come here to give advice on money matters, so I know where to go if I need help.”

Alison was seen walking to & fro along the street in front of Number 28 before actually coming in. When she did come in, she was extremely nervous, shaking and tearful, saying she wasn’t sure if she was in the right place, but had been told about Number 28 by the Social Prescriber at the local Medical Centre.

On being taken to a quiet corner, over lots of tea & biscuits, Alison explained that she had been suffering with menopausal mental health issues for well over a year. She had to give up her job as she could not cope with the pressure and had been living on her savings for the past six months but had now run out of money. She was told to come & see the advisors from Citizens Advice and the Financial Inclusion Team. After a couple of hours of chatting, Alison said that

she had been made to feel so welcome at Number 28, that she felt safe, and it was the first time she had laughed in six months. She continues to pop in from time to time.

David arrived at Number 28 one day, very nervous. Over a cup of coffee, he broke down into tears & explained had been in a high-paid job but had been made redundant during Covid. This had led to a family breakdown, his wife & daughters had moved out, he was on the point of being made homeless as he was paying all his benefits to his family & had nothing to look forward to. Swift referrals were made to a range of support agencies and an emergency food package was given out. One volunteer undertook a telephone befriending service, which was particularly useful when David didn't turn up to appointments. Knowing he had support and somewhere to turn, David said he felt "he had turned a corner". He has become self-employed and is so busy he is looking to employ someone to help him. He has kept in touch over the months & is offering his services as a telephone befriender knowing the importance of having someone to turn to.

Max came in, rather nervous/agitated and asked if he could have some emergency food. He had tried to come in on a Tuesday to apply for the Food Hall but had an engineer looking at his cooker which wasn't working. He explained he had no food or money, but that he understood that to get food from the Food Hall he had to pay £3.50. He gets his benefits paid on Friday, so offered to bring in £3.50 then if we could give him some food. Gemma, our Volunteer Coordinator, made up a package (no charge as an emergency). He also completed an application form to join Food Hall (I explained the long waiting list) - he said he wouldn't need to use it every week, just when money gets really short. Turns out he comes from Essex, but moved away due to domestic violence which put him in hospital requiring several operations. Firstly living in Lowestoft, he moved to Bungay a year ago, and has been unemployed 3 years, but previously worked in the care sector and desperately wants to get back to work. He rides his bike everywhere to search out bargains. Ed, the DWP Job Club coach, immediately took him to Veronica (a Care Agency employer using No. 28 as a recruitment outreach) for an interview. Best interview she'd done in a long time she reported afterwards - he even explained the Mental Capacity Act when asked a question about safeguarding. Offered a position on the spot - just needs to get his passport back (DWP to pay for this due to job offer). So came in for food, walked out with food & a job offer!

Case Statement of a volunteer: I became a telephone advisor/driver and have really enjoyed helping those that are less able than myself. It is great to actually meet some of the residents and put faces to voices when I go on the road. Have I made a difference? Of course I have. I bring help to those who cannot otherwise get out of the house, a smiley face at the door and a conversation that might never happen. And we bring hope to those residents who are lonely. I love doing what I do and cannot imagine not doing it.

Case study of outreach work: Sarah also came to the Financial Inclusion Team because she had no income and was facing eviction for rent arrears. The team assisted her to make applications for Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment and Discretionary Housing Payment, two of which were awarded and the other is pending an assessment. Three grant applications were completed and successful in securing funding, and Sarah's rent arrears were completely cleared. A referral has been made to Citizens Advice for specialist debt advice, and the team has worked with Sarah to complete the required 'debt pack' paperwork in preparation for her first appointment, which the team will attend with her. As Sarah's trust grew in the team, she shared more information about her circumstances including how she felt lonely and isolated, and the team were able to connect her with a local social group which Sarah has since attended several times and very much enjoyed.

Lessons learnt during the year

- It is very hard work, particularly ensuring compliance with regulations & to find finances.
- Curbing the expectations of what is expected from a volunteer from statutory services and at times from the service recipient. We have examples of patients being discharged from hospital and the authority expecting the befriending volunteer to move furniture, provide personal care and cook all meals for the patient.
- There is a great level of dedication & commitment of volunteers and staff to help their community which is invaluable.
- Be warm, welcoming & non-judgemental, with a cup of tea & a listening ear ready.
- Ensure a volunteer realises they are not alone undertaking any service; that they too are supported and are able to signpost as appropriate.
- Be extremely flexible in approach and reactive to change and need
- Listen to the community – service users, volunteers, residents, statutory services
- Don't be afraid to try something, and if it doesn't work, to change.
- Partnership & outreach work is a major contributor to benefitting the community.



Linda Bailey
 Treasurer/Trustee
 Bungay Community Support
 July 2024

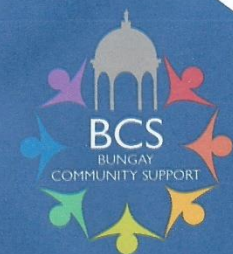


Bungay Community Support What's On This Week

| | | |
|------------------|---|--|
| Monday | 10:00am – 12:00pm |  Baby Basics (2 nd & 4 th of the month) * 0-4yrs, Preloved Clothes. |
| Tuesday | 10:00am – 12:00pm |  Citizens Advice Free & confidential advice. |
| | 10:30am – 12:30pm |  Food Hall Open to members. |
| | 2:00pm – 4:00pm |  Food Hall Open to members. |
| | 12:00pm – 4:00pm |  Cuppa & Company Pop in for a chinwag. |
| Wednesday | 10:00am – 12:00pm |  Open Craft Session Bring your own project. Chat & share ideas. |
| | 10:00am – 2:00pm |  Warm Welcomes Free soup & roll lunch! |
| | 1:00pm – 4:00pm Fortnightly Sessions |  Job Club (Beccles Job Centre) * Help & support with looking for work. Realise Futures * Advice & Guidance for those With learning difficulties or Autism. |
| Thursday | 10:00am – 12:00pm |  Financial Inclusion Team Friendly & impartial chat about money. |
| | 12:00pm – 4:00pm |  Warm Welcomes Free Teatime Treats! |
| | 12:00pm – 4:00pm |  Jigsaw, Books & Boardgames Play cards & more, Join in! |

* Some sessions are not on weekly so please check our social media or telephone for latest updates

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Charity No. 1200141



bungaycommunitysupport.org.uk