



VOLUNTARY ACTION ACROSS
ARUN, CHICHESTER AND SUSSEX

IMPACT REPORT

2025 / 2026

Driving Voluntary Action and Active Communities

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CHAIR'S REPORT

As Chair of Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester, I am delighted to introduce our Impact Report for the year.

This past year has once again highlighted the value of VAAC's work during both challenging and exciting times. Through its continued support and advocacy for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector across Arun, Chichester and the wider Sussex VCSE landscape, VAAC has helped organisations navigate increasing pressures while strengthening local communities.



This work demonstrates the significant impact that can be achieved when charities, volunteers, funders, local community partners and public sector partners work together towards a shared goal.

Despite well-documented pressures across the sector, this has been a year of significant progress. We have expanded volunteering opportunities, enhanced training and support provision, strengthened key partnerships, and ensured that the voice of the voluntary sector continues to be heard, valued, and acted upon where it matters most. We have also continued to develop our organisation, diversify income sources, and strengthen our approach to evidencing impact. As the report demonstrates, it has been a busy and productive year.

As I reflect on the achievements highlighted throughout this report, I am particularly heartened by the breadth and depth of VAAC's impact. Whilst helping organisations access funding remains an important part of our work, our contribution extends far beyond this. Through governance support, leadership development, training and organisational development, we are helping local charities and community groups build the confidence, capability and resilience they need not only to withstand challenges, but to grow, innovate and continue serving their communities. The legacy case studies featured in this report provide powerful examples of how this support creates lasting benefits, strengthening organisations and helping to build a more sustainable voluntary sector for the future.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, members, funders and partners. On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed their time, expertise and support throughout the year.

As we look ahead, we remain ambitious for the future. By continuing to champion collaboration, resilience and community action, we can help ensure that our local VCSE sector continues to thrive and make a lasting difference for the communities we serve.

Dr Sarah Morgan

Chair, Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester

2025 / 2026 AT A GLANCE

*Making Lives
Better Together.*

666
members



£2.13 million
external
funding
secured

138



**volunteers
successfully placed**

24% PLACEMENT RATE



**organisations
supported on
a 1:1 basis**

105

19



**training & development
events**

545

**participants
trained**



14

**networking &
sector events
held**



CASE STUDY 01

Waves Music Therapy

The ambition was simple but powerful: to make high-quality music therapy accessible to children, young people, adults and families who needed it most.



Background and ambition

Waves Music Therapy was founded in 2013 by Victoria Hartkemeyer after she moved to Sussex and recognised a gap in affordable music therapy support for local families. A call from a parent seeking urgent help for a child in distress highlighted how private therapy costs placed support beyond the reach of many households.

Victoria responded by offering support free of charge, then secured a £5,000 start-up grant from West Sussex County Council and established Waves as a Community Interest Company (CIC). The ambition was simple but powerful: to make high-quality music therapy accessible to children, young people, adults and families who needed it most.

The role of VAAC

VAAC became a trusted source of guidance as Waves moved from a small founder-led initiative into a growing organisation. Its support included help with fundraising, proofreading applications, strengthening online presence, identifying opportunities, making local connections and challenging the organisation to think strategically about governance and sustainability.

In 2023, VAAC's strategic development support marked a turning point. Strategy sessions with staff and trustees helped Waves identify where it had outgrown informal structures and needed stronger leadership, policies, financial systems and trustee expertise to achieve its ambitions.

Growth and milestones

Since launch, Waves has grown organically in response to community need. What began with one therapist and a small grant became a collaborative team of music therapists, creative practitioners, musicians, songwriters and rap artists delivering support across Sussex.

- 2013 Waves founded to make music therapy more accessible.
- 2017 Formal fundraising activity began, supported by VAAC guidance.
- 2021 Waves transitioned from CIC to registered charity.
- 2023 VAAC-supported strategy days identified the need for stronger governance and long-term planning.
- 2024 A strengthened trustee board was recruited, bringing expertise in advertising, healthcare, finance, charity leadership and strategic development.
- 2025 Waves secured three years of funding from BBC Children in Need.
- 2026 Waves secured four years of funding from The National Lottery Community Fund.

Impact of VAAC's support

VAAC's support helped Waves build confidence, resilience and credibility. The organisation developed stronger governance, clearer decision-making, improved financial planning, better reporting systems and a more ambitious long-term strategy.

VAAC also helped Waves access partnerships and community networks, including connections with Creative Heart, The Nest in Chichester and Regis School of Music. These relationships created opportunities for shared delivery, collaborative funding applications and a stronger local presence.

Legacy of VAAC support

The legacy of VAAC's involvement can be seen in Waves' stronger foundations. The charity now has a skilled trustee board, improved policies, multi-year funding, three-year financial forecasting, Xero accounting software, better board reporting and a clearer strategic direction.

VAAC's encouragement also helped Waves move from reacting to immediate pressures to planning confidently for the future. The organisation is now better placed to secure funding, evidence its impact and collaborate with partners across the community, education, health and research sectors.

Looking forward

Waves is now in the strongest position in its history. With secure multi-year funding, a strengthened board, growing partnerships and academic collaborations, the charity can focus on sustainable growth while remaining true to its founding ambition: ensuring that music therapy and creative support reach people who would otherwise be unable to access them.

The charity is exploring new opportunities through partnerships, research and service development, including work with the University of Chichester on the impact of drumming on the wellbeing of children and young people with additional and complex needs.

Lessons learned

Waves learned that strong frontline work is not enough on its own: impact must be clearly evidenced, translated into funder priorities and supported by robust governance. The organisation also learned the importance of diversifying income, building partnerships and bringing in expertise beyond music therapy.

The Ham Manor strategy day was difficult but transformational. It showed that meaningful growth can require honest challenge, stronger systems and changes in leadership approach. For Waves, this became the catalyst for recruiting a skilled board and planning with greater ambition.



Impact figures

1,700

children, young people
and adults with
additional needs
supported in 2025

91%

of sessions delivered at
no cost to beneficiaries

28

professionals involved in
delivery, including music
therapists, creative
practitioners, musicians,
songwriters and rap artists

3 YEARS

of BBC Children in Need
funding secured in 2025

4 YEARS

of The National Lottery
Community Fund
support secured in 2026

5

new trustees recruited,
strengthening governance,
finance, marketing,
healthcare and charity
sector expertise

“ VAAC believed in Waves’ potential and gave us the guidance, challenge and encouragement we needed to grow. Their support helped us strengthen our governance, build confidence and become a more resilient charity capable of reaching many more children, young people and families.



CASE STUDY 02

Chichester District Food Bank

From a small city food bank to a district-wide community lifeline



Background and ambition

When Chichester District Food Bank first engaged with VAAC, it was a small, volunteer-led organisation operating only in Chichester, with a coordinator employed for one day a week.

The ambition was to become a district-wide service, with centres across the area. To do that, the organisation needed funding, confidence and practical support to plan for growth.

“ You should never be scared of failure. Even if something fails, you can still learn from it.

The role of VAAC

VAAC's early support focused on funding. Through a University of Chichester project, fundraising students researched opportunities and prepared bids, giving the food bank vital fundraising capacity.

This helped secure multi-year funding from the Henry Smith Charity and further support through Sussex Community Foundation.

Growth and milestones

- A key early milestone was rent-free warehouse space in an aircraft hangar at Tangmere, giving the food bank room to manage donations and expand.
- New centres followed in Selsey in 2013, then Midhurst and Petworth in 2014, supported by churches, community groups, councils and volunteers.
- In April 2014, the food bank became an independent charity: Chichester District Food Bank.
- COVID-19 brought another shift, accelerating new systems and enabling the charity to rent a dedicated building for warehouse operations and community activity.

Impact of VAAC's support

VAAC's impact went beyond funding. It strengthened the food bank's understanding of governance, good practice and charity leadership, and helped build confidence with funders.

Support with communications and client voice also helped the charity look more professional, reach more people and present its work more strategically.

“ **VAAC were always ahead of the game when it came to governance. Being a trustee made me a better CEO.** ”

Lessons learned

A key lesson was the value of teamwork. Volunteers were treated as a skilled project team, with ownership, authority and permission to lead.

Leadership meant recognising strengths, welcoming expertise and encouraging staff and volunteers to bring ideas, take ownership and be brave.

Beyond emergency food support

The Trussell Trust Pathfinder Programme then helped the charity move beyond emergency food towards tackling the causes of financial hardship.

Pathfinder action and partnerships

Through Pathfinder, the food bank developed projects to reduce food bank need, including a three-year Citizens Advice partnership that placed an adviser in food bank sessions and offered telephone support to outreach locations.

The charity also invested in client voice, appointing a role to listen to people's experiences and involve them in shaping support.

Partnerships broadened support beyond food. Chichester Harbour Rotary Club provided a weekly clothes rail, and the charity used its own building to deepen community engagement.

Pathfinder impact

The Citizens Advice partnership improved access to money, debt and benefits advice, while participation work ensured people's experiences were heard and valued.

Over time, the food bank's work became less about food alone and more about helping people move out of crisis, build confidence and take part in community life.

Continuing legacy

The result is a broader, more person-centred model of support, rooted in partnership and shaped by people with lived experience.

Impact figures

6,000

people fed and supported across
the district

100 tonnes

food and toiletries distributed
each year

~250

volunteers

6 staff

grown from 1 part-time member
of staff to 6 staff - 3 full-time

“ VAAC has always been so supportive and helpful. No question is too small or stupid. They always know someone who can help. I particularly value the training and networking days on offer. It is always surprising how many good conversations come out of these events. I would absolutely recommend that a charity becomes part of VAAC as a place to turn for support and guidance.



CASE STUDY 03

Cancer United

From a small idea to a growing, sustainable charity supporting people affected by cancer through specialist exercise, wellbeing and rehabilitation.

Background and ambition

Cancer United was launched in November 2012 and has been a member of VAAC since 2014. When the charity first engaged with VAAC, it was at a very early stage: “just me and an idea” — a design, a mission and the determination to make something happen. The ambition was to create practical, cancer-specific exercise, wellbeing and rehabilitation support for people affected by cancer, while building a charity with strong foundations and a sustainable future.

The role of VAAC

Jan, the founder first heard about VAAC online and was surprised to discover that the support was free. VAAC provided access to meetings, workshops, speakers, funding advice, policies, training, networking opportunities and introductions to useful contacts and partnerships.

This support was especially valuable because the early stages of setting up and growing Cancer United felt lonely at times. Through VAAC, Cancer United gained knowledge about how to become and run a charity properly. The founder described absorbing the learning “like a sponge”, taking on board the experiences of others and applying that learning directly to the organisation’s development.

Growth and milestones

- The Cancer United gym launched in October 2015 and is approaching its 11th birthday.
- The gym now records around 6,000 attendances each year.
- Cancer United has around 280 active members.
- The organisation continues to welcome new people, including five new consultations in one recent week.
- The CU Fitter cancer-specific exercise programme has been developed and has now moved online.
- CU on the Ward launched in 2022, offering patients at Worthing Hospital access to exercise videos and a free resistance band.
- A new website has recently been launched, providing a stronger platform for sharing Cancer United’s work, stories and films.

“ Just me and an idea.



CANCER UNITED

Impact of VAAC's support

VAAC's support gave Cancer United access to the knowledge, confidence and connections needed to move from an early idea into a well-established charity. Its guidance helped Jan understand the practical requirements of running a voluntary organisation, including governance, policies, funding, training and partnership development.

Just as importantly, VAAC helped reduce the isolation of starting a charity from scratch. Through meetings, workshops and networking opportunities, Cancer United was able to learn from others, build useful relationships and gain reassurance that support was available when new challenges or opportunities arose.

This practical and emotional support contributed to Cancer United's ability to grow more quickly and sustainably, strengthening its foundations while helping it develop services that now reach hundreds of active members and thousands of attendances each year.

Legacy of VAAC support

VAAC's long-term support helped Cancer United grow faster, with greater confidence and stronger foundations. Jan reflected that without VAAC, progress would have taken much longer. VAAC offered not only practical help, but also reassurance: an organisation to go back to, ask questions of, and seek guidance from when new ideas emerged.

As Cancer United has grown from a small local charity into an organisation supporting thousands of attendances each year, VAAC has remained a solid and trusted partner. Its advice has been practical, accessible and grounded in an understanding of the realities and challenges of running a charity.



Lessons learned

One of Cancer United's strongest lessons is the value of listening closely to members. While the cancer-specific exercise classes were a clear priority from the beginning, many other benefits have grown directly from members' ideas, needs and feedback. These include choir, walking, running, walking football and other social and wellbeing activities.

This member-led approach means Cancer United continues to respond to what people affected by cancer say they want and need. Feedback, surveys, questionnaires and informal conversations all help shape the charity's direction. Another important lesson has been to grow boldly but sustainably, avoiding overstretch while continuing to develop new services and partnerships.

Looking forward

Cancer United continues to grow at a pace that feels sustainable and manageable. The charity is developing services including cancer prehabilitation, rehabilitation, psychological wellbeing and the new Cancer United Centre of Excellence, supported by significant grant funding from charitable trusts, foundations, corporate partners and public funders.

Impact figures

Member since
2014

~15
active volunteers

~280
active members

6,000+
beneficiaries supported
Over 6,000 attendances
each year since 2019 to the
CUFITTER gym.

PARTNERSHIPS

University Hospitals Sussex,
NHS Sussex, Southampton
Prehabilitation Service, local
GPs and community partners.

FUNDING

Significant grant funding
from charitable trusts,
foundations, corporate
partners and public funders.

“ Without VAAC, I don't think Cancer United would have progressed as fast as it did. The learning, meetings, workshops and funding support were invaluable. It helped me understand how to become and run a proper charity, and it made the journey feel much less lonely.



“ As the founder and trustee of Cancer United, I would wholeheartedly recommend Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester to any voluntary or community organisation. They are far more than an infrastructure organisation; they are an essential partner in helping charities thrive and make a lasting difference to the communities they serve.

Jan Sheward BEM
Founder and Trustee

CASE STUDY 04

Volya Art Community Group

How VAAC helped Volya Art Community Group build capacity, secure funding and create lasting impact for Ukrainian and local communities.

Background and ambition

Volya Choir was founded in December 2022 by Ukrainian women who arrived in the UK after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and quickly became a source of friendship, emotional support and cultural connection for people rebuilding their lives in West Sussex.

Volya's ambition was to preserve Ukrainian culture, support Ukrainian families, reduce social isolation and create opportunities for meaningful integration through arts, music and community activities. To achieve this, the group needed guidance, networks and access to funding opportunities.

Members of the choir had limited experience of the UK voluntary sector and lacked knowledge of governance, fundraising and organisational development. While there was strong enthusiasm and commitment, there was no formal structure to support further growth.

The role of VAAC

VAAC helped the group understand how the voluntary sector operates in the UK and the benefits of formalising as a community organisation. Support included governance advice, organisational development, partnership-building and identifying suitable funding opportunities.

VAAC also helped Volya build confidence as a community-led organisation, enabling members to take ownership of projects, strengthen leadership skills and develop an ambitious programme of cultural and wellbeing activities.

As a result, Volya successfully secured support from organisations including Sussex Community Foundation, Chichester City Council, Chichester District Council, Chalk Cliff Trust.

Growth and milestones

Since engaging with VAAC, Volya has experienced significant growth in both scale and impact.

Key milestones include:

- Establishment of Volya Art Community Group as a recognised community organisation.
- Delivery of community events, attracting between 150 and 300 attendees each. Including Ukrainian Christmas celebrations for Ukrainian families in Chichester District in December 2024 attended by around 200 guests and 105 children.
- Development of wellbeing activities, social gatherings, excursions and creative workshops for Ukrainian families.



VOLYA ART COMMUNITY GROUP

Volya's most significant achievement to date was the Ukrainian Cultural Festival "The Spirit of Ukraine", held at St Paul's Church, Chichester, on 15 November 2025.

The festival showcased Ukrainian and British performers from across Southern England, including choirs, soloists, musicians, dancers and poets. The event celebrated Ukrainian culture while creating opportunities for cultural exchange, friendship and mutual understanding between Ukrainian and British communities.

The festival also raised above a thousand pounds for Chestnut Tree House children's hospice, demonstrating Volya's commitment to contributing positively to the wider community.



Impact of VAAC's support

VAAC's support helped create change at both organisational and community levels.

For Volya as an organisation, support led to:

- Improved governance and organisational capacity
- Increased confidence in applying for and managing funding.
- Stronger partnerships with local authorities, charities and community organisations.

For the community, the impact included:

- Reduced social isolation and improved wellbeing through regular social and cultural activities among Ukrainian residents
- Increased opportunities for Ukrainians and local residents to connect and build relationships.
- Greater awareness and appreciation of Ukrainian culture within West Sussex.

Volya's activities have provided a safe and welcoming environment where Ukrainians can maintain connections to their heritage while developing a sense of belonging within their local communities.

Lessons learned

The group's journey has not been without challenges.

As a newly formed organisation made up of volunteers with different experiences and expectations, Volya experienced occasional misunderstandings regarding priorities, decision-making and the future direction of the group. These challenges highlighted the importance of clear communication, effective governance and shared objectives.

With support and experience, the organisation improved ways of working together, helping members focus on their common goals.

A continuing challenge is securing sustainable funding. While the group has successfully attracted grant funding and local support, demand for its activities doesn't go away as the war in Ukraine continues. Ensuring long-term financial sustainability remains a key priority for the organisation.

These experiences have strengthened Volya's resilience and reinforced the importance of planning, partnership working and strong governance.



Legacy of VAAC support

Only three years after becoming formally established, Volya has grown into a trusted community organisation with a strong reputation among local authorities, funders, partner organisations, and community members. During this time, it has built lasting partnerships and created opportunities for hundreds of people to take part in cultural, educational, and wellbeing activities.

The success of the Spirit of Ukraine Festival brought significant recognition from local civic leaders. Following the event, Volya representatives were invited to attend the Mayor's "At Home" reception and were the only migrant-led voluntary organisation represented. The Mayor praised the quality and impact of the festival and expressed his hope that it would become a regular annual event in Chichester.

Long-term difference

Today, Volya is not only preserving Ukrainian culture but also helping to build stronger, more inclusive communities across West Sussex. The organisation continues to bring people together through music, arts, volunteering, fundraising and cultural exchange.

Future plans include expanding the Heartwarming Get-Together with Volya Art Community programme, strengthening volunteer engagement, increasing opportunities for wellbeing support and developing new cultural and educational initiatives involving both Ukrainian and British residents.

The long-term difference created by VAAC's support is a confident, community-led organisation that is equipped to continue building bridges between communities, reducing isolation and promoting understanding for years to come.

Impact figures

5

Ukrainian community events in Chichester organised.

4

winter celebration events delivered to recognise and thank own volunteers for their contribution and support

£7,000

secured in funding from a range of grant programmes and community funding sources.

30

events participated in across Southern England

Built a dedicated team of 12 choir members and 20 active volunteers who help deliver activities and events.



“

When we first approached VAAC, we had already enjoyed some success performing as a Ukrainian women's folk choir. We had passion, dedication, and a desire to make a difference, but little understanding of how to grow and develop as an organisation in the UK. VAAC gave us the knowledge, confidence, and connections we needed to take that next step and become a recognised community group.

Thanks to their support, we have secured funding, organised major cultural events, launched regular wellbeing activities, and created opportunities for Ukrainians and local residents to come together. What began as a choir has grown into a vibrant community organisation that continues to bring people together and make a positive difference across West Sussex.

Svitlana Herchenova

Chairwoman

Volya Art Community Group

CASE STUDY 05

Midhurst Hub

From Crisis Response to Community Legacy.

Background and ambition

Midhurst Hub was born from a simple but powerful observation: food poverty was often not the root problem, but a visible sign of wider hardship. Through their experience of establishing and running Midhurst Food Bank, Chrissy Abbott and fellow volunteers saw that many people needed help with financial insecurity, housing, isolation, poor mental health, unemployment and access to services.

In a rural area such as Midhurst and its surrounding villages, those challenges are intensified by geography. Services may exist, but for residents without transport they can feel unreachable. As one trustee put it, “If you’re poor and you haven’t got a car, the South Downs might as well be the Alps.”

The ambition was therefore to create a trusted, local organisation that could listen carefully, understand the whole person, connect residents to practical help and strengthen the community around them.

The role of VAAC

VAAC’s legacy is evident in the confidence, structure and sustainability of Midhurst Hub today. The charity has maintained its strong local relationships while developing the systems needed to secure its future.

This support gave trustees access to templates, advice and reassurance at a crucial time, helping them build strong foundations before launch. VAAC’s role continued as the organisation matured, including strategic planning and sustainability support led by Jackie Sumner in October 2025.

The relationship with VAAC helped Midhurst Hub strengthen its governance, clarify future priorities and prepare for leadership succession, while retaining the values-led, community-focused approach that made the organisation effective.



Growth and milestones

The first formal meeting of Midhurst Community Hub trustees took place in June 2021. Over the following eighteen months, trustees registered the charity, recruited and trained volunteers, established governance arrangements, developed policies, created a website, secured initial funding and built relationships across the community.

Midhurst Hub officially launched in November 2022, deliberately choosing a model of organic growth: start well, build trust, listen carefully and expand in response to real community need. Today, the Hub works across two strategic aims: enabling independence and building community. Volunteer advisers support residents with benefits, housing, homelessness, damp and mould, Blue Badge applications, bus passes, disability-related support, passports and referrals to specialist services.

Alongside one-to-one support, the Hub has created a strong collaborative platform through the Midhurst Community Forum, bringing together local organisations to identify shared priorities and develop practical community-led solutions.

Lessons learned

Midhurst Hub's experience shows that successful community development begins with listening. Many residents arrive with one presenting issue, but deeper challenges often emerge only when trust has been built.

The Hub has also learned the value of growing at the right pace. By developing organically, trustees and volunteers were able to build credibility, avoid overpromising and respond to need in a sustainable way.

The strength of the model lies in partnership. By bringing organisations together through the Community Forum, the Hub has helped shift the local culture from separate activity to shared problem-solving.

Legacy of VAAC support

VAAC's legacy can be seen in the confidence, structure and sustainability of Midhurst Hub today. The charity has retained its local, relational character while strengthening the systems needed to protect its future.

The Hub's values — kindness, respect, discretion, compassion and humility — remain central to the way trustees, volunteers and partners work with clients and each other. VAAC's support helped create the conditions in which those values could be translated into effective governance, practical delivery and long-term community benefit.

Looking forward

As founding leaders plan succession and new trustees are recruited, Midhurst Hub enters its next chapter from a position of strength. The charity is also moving from paper-based records to secure digital case management systems, while maintaining the face-to-face, person-centred approach that defines its work.

The ambition remains clear: to help local people become more independent, strengthen community connections and ensure that nobody faces life's challenges alone.

MIDHURST HUB

Impact of VAAC support

VAAC's support helped Midhurst Hub move from a community concern to a resilient local charity. Early governance support enabled trustees to operate confidently and responsibly, while later strategic facilitation helped the Board think beyond day-to-day delivery and plan for long-term sustainability.

- A formal Business Plan
- A Risk Register
- Trustee role descriptions
- Chair, Treasurer and Secretary role profiles
- Improved succession planning
- Stronger governance arrangements

This organisational development has helped Midhurst Hub remain focused, accountable and resilient while continuing to grow its services and partnerships.



Impact figures

~270	400+	40	150+	15
individual clients supported	separate cases managed	volunteers involved	residents involved in community lunches	surrounding parishes reached
30+	50	45-50	< £25k	£60k-£70k
partner organisations involved	practitioners and community leaders now attending the Community Forum	people attending three weekly community lunches	annual running costs	estimated funds raised since inception

“ We could not have achieved this without the support of Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester. From the earliest days, VAAC helped us establish strong governance, policies and procedures, supported trustee development and provided practical advice as we grew. More recently, Jackie Sumner facilitated a strategic planning and succession planning process that has helped us prepare for the future and ensure the charity remains sustainable beyond its founding leadership.

Chrissie Abbott

Founder and Chair of Trustees
Midhurst Hub

CASE STUDY 06

Tuppenny Barn

Growing a greener future through education, community and a shared care for the environment.

Background and ambition

Tuppenny Barn began when Maggie Hayes set out to build an organisation rooted in environmental values, education and community benefit. The original operation started as Tuppenny Barn Organics, a commercial company, but the long-term ambition was always to become a not-for-profit organisation with a clear social and environmental purpose.

With no previous experience of running a business or setting up a charity, Maggie sought guidance on how the organisation should be constituted and how it could grow sustainably while staying true to its founding values.

The role of VAAC

VAAC provided early and practical guidance on legal structure, governance, fundraising and organisational development. Its support helped Maggie understand the implications of different legal models, including the move away from a company limited by shares towards a company limited by guarantee.

VAAC also supported the organisation through courses, workshops, networking events, funding searches and one-to-one advice. As plans developed for a new all-year-round building, VAAC helped clarify what was needed to fundraise transparently and effectively.



TUPPENNY BARN

Growth and milestones

Around 18–19 years ago, Maggie first approached VAAC for advice on constitution and governance. By 2008, the recession exposed the limits of the original business model and prompted a renewed focus on generating income while protecting the organisation's environmental mission.

The organisation then developed plans for an environmentally friendly, weatherproof timber-frame building with straw-bale infill. The building would make it possible to run education sessions, workshops and activities throughout the year, while also providing offices and toilets.

Raising the £400,000 needed for the project took six years. Rather than borrowing money, the organisation chose to build as funding became available, reducing financial pressure and allowing the project to progress at a manageable pace.

Legacy of VAAC support

VAAC's support helped the organisation make better governance decisions, access funding opportunities and build confidence as it evolved from an early-stage idea into a more established community organisation. The support also helped the organisation navigate practical challenges, including board development, funding applications and volunteer recruitment.

One significant example was a £25,000 council grant that was initially refused. A VAAC representative professionally challenged the decision, brought people back around the table and helped secure the funding.

VAAC also supported recruitment through its volunteer database and publicity, contributing to a volunteer base that now includes around 85 people.

Lessons learned

The journey highlighted the importance of getting the legal structure right from the outset, seeking advice early and building a strong board of trustees. Maggie reflected that learning how to operate effectively as a board was one of the biggest challenges, with some trustees proving highly active while others were less hands-on than hoped.

The organisation also learned the value of resilience. Ongoing financial pressures, the decision not to borrow, and the need to build gradually all reinforced the importance of patience, persistence and realistic growth.

Legacy of VAAC support

VAAC's support has had a lasting impact on Tuppenny Barn. Beyond helping the organisation secure advice and funding, VAAC helped it become part of a wider voluntary sector community where organisations share knowledge, collaborate and support one another.

As the organisation's profile grew, it was also able to give back by hosting and running workshops for VAAC from the completed building, strengthening the relationship and supporting others across the sector.



TUPPENNY BARN

Looking forward

Looking ahead, the organisation continues to face the realities of tight funding and the wider cost-of-living crisis. Free, trusted infrastructure support remains vital, particularly for charities and community organisations that need advice, connections and reassurance at key stages of their development.

Maggie continues to recommend VAAC to new charities and community groups, especially those at an early stage. Her advice is to contact VAAC as soon as possible, because even when VAAC cannot help directly, it can usually signpost organisations to the right source of support.

Impact figures

18–19 years
of support from VAAC

£400k
raised over six years for
the environmentally
friendly building

£25k
council grant secured
following VAAC support

85
volunteers now
supporting Tuppenny
Barn

VAAC support has included:
Governance • fundraising • funding searches • training •
networking • volunteer recruitment • signposting



“

I am a huge supporter of VAAC. The value they provide to charities and the wider voluntary sector is incredible. Their networking, advice and support create a genuine community where organisations help one another rather than compete.

1. Rethinking our Health: MSK Prevention and Persistent Pain Project

Working with Here and The King's Fund

Why we got involved

VAAC became involved because the communities most affected by health inequalities are the same communities supported by our member groups, including people on low incomes, people living with disabilities, people experiencing poor housing, and those facing social isolation. We were uniquely placed to connect NHS partners with these communities through trusted, established relationships.

What we did

VAAC worked in collaboration with Here and The King's Fund to design and deliver a project aimed at preventing people from developing long-term musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions and persistent pain.

This included:



Community interviews with people already living with persistent pain.



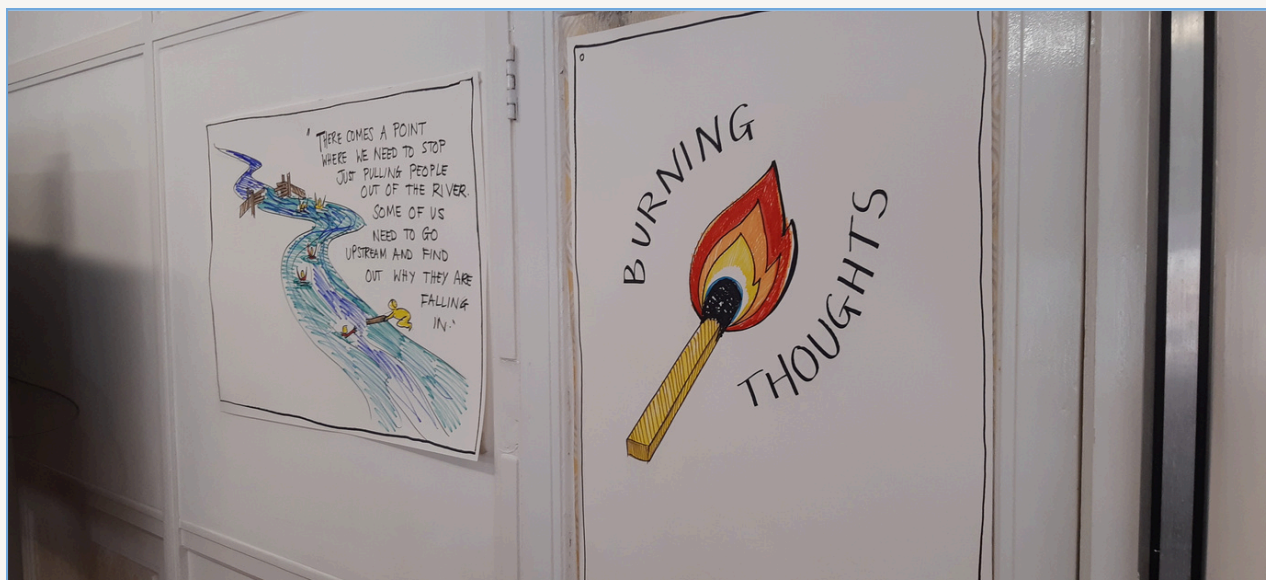
A co-production event bringing together community members and health professionals.



Creative engagement activities that enabled people to share experiences and ideas in accessible ways.



A community-based early pain drop-in service involving physiotherapy, social prescribing and wider support services.



RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY HEALTH ENGAGEMENT

Impact

Although attendance at the drop-in service was lower than originally anticipated, those who attended consistently reported positive experiences and valued the holistic support available in a community setting.

The project demonstrated the value of:



Bringing health professionals into community spaces.



Using co-production to design services around people's lived experience.



Supporting earlier intervention and prevention.



Strengthening understanding between communities and NHS partners.

A key legacy of the project has been the development of a persistent pain peer support group, providing ongoing support, reducing isolation and enabling people with shared experiences to support one another. The group is gradually moving towards becoming community-led and self-sustaining.



2. Community Connectors

Why we got involved

Many people in our communities experience loneliness, isolation, poor wellbeing and barriers to participation. The Community Connectors programme was designed to help people build confidence, create social connections and access opportunities within their local community.

What we did

VAAC supported participants to turn their own ideas into practical community activities that reflected their interests, needs and aspirations. One example was a walking group based at Makerspace, where participants built confidence, developed social connections and began taking greater ownership of how the group was run.

The project also connected participants to volunteering opportunities, further education and wider community activities.

Impact

The project has demonstrated the significant value of community-led approaches.

Participants have:



Built meaningful friendships and support networks.



Accessed volunteering and learning opportunities.



Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation.



Become active contributors within their wider community.



Increased confidence and social participation.

“Christmas Day was a wonderful get together for people who were going to be alone. It was a very special day.

One particularly powerful example involved a participant recovering from a severe stroke who initially struggled both physically and socially. Through regular participation, they improved mobility, regained confidence and progressed towards work experience opportunities.

The group has also developed strong peer support, with members organising social activities independently and supporting one another beyond the formal programme. A Christmas Day gathering organised by members ensured that people who would otherwise have spent the day alone were able to celebrate together.

The programme shows how relatively small, community-based interventions can have a profound impact on wellbeing, confidence and social connection.

3. Research Engagement Network (REN)

Why we got involved

The communities that VAAC works alongside and supports are often underrepresented in health and social care research despite being disproportionately affected by many health inequalities. REN was established to increase diversity in research and ensure that people with lived experience help shape research priorities and design.

What we did

VAAC worked with universities, public health teams, NHS organisations and researchers to improve the involvement of underrepresented communities in research.

This included:



Supporting community research projects.



Facilitating interviews with people from diverse communities.



Advising researchers on inclusive engagement and recruitment.



Promoting opportunities for people with lived experience to influence research design.



Delivering events to help community organisations understand and participate in research.

One significant piece of work involved supporting the Sussex Cancer Research Centre to gather insights from people within the Ukrainian community and other underrepresented groups to inform their Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement strategy.



RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY HEALTH ENGAGEMENT

Impact

REN has opened up entirely new areas of work for VAAC and significantly increased the organisation's profile beyond the voluntary and community sector. It has also highlighted the specialist skills of VAAC staff in community engagement and outreach, particularly their ability to build trust, reach underrepresented communities and support meaningful participation in research.

Through this work, VAAC has:



Developed strong relationships with universities, public health teams, NHS partners and researchers.



Become recognised as a trusted partner in community engagement and co-production.



Been approached directly by academics and researchers seeking support with community involvement and participant recruitment.



Influenced how research projects are designed and delivered.



Created opportunities for communities to shape research that affects them.

Importantly, this work has also opened up new funding opportunities and strengthened VAAC's reputation as an organisation that can effectively bridge the gap between communities, researchers and public services.

Whilst research engagement may initially appear separate from VAAC's traditional work, it is firmly aligned with our core mission. The communities most affected by health inequalities are the same communities that VAAC supports every day, making this a natural extension of our commitment to amplifying community voices and reducing

Organisational Impact

By successfully delivering this work, VAAC has broadened its influence, strengthened its credibility and established itself within new networks across health, research and academia.

As a result, VAAC is increasingly seen as a valued partner for projects seeking meaningful engagement with diverse and underrepresented communities, creating new opportunities that will continue to benefit both the organisation and the communities it serves.



Looking forward

As we reflect on the year so far, I am proud of the difference we are making across Arun and Chichester. By supporting charities, community groups and volunteers, securing new funding, and strengthening partnerships, we have continued to build resilient, connected communities that can respond to local needs and opportunities.

Behind every project, training session, volunteering opportunity and piece of advice is a shared commitment to helping people thrive. I would like to thank our members, volunteers, partners, funders, trustees and staff for their continued support. Together, we are creating lasting positive change and strengthening the communities we serve.

Jackie Sumner

Chief Executive, Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester



For the VCSE Sector In 2026/27 the charity plans to continue its activities, subject to satisfactory funding arrangements.

Key priorities include:

- Further develop and enhance support and advice services for members.
- Increase membership and engagement.
- Prevention – Early Support / ICT.
- Strengthen partnership working across West Sussex.
- Expand training, networking and continuous professional development opportunities.
- Continue to evidence and promote the social value of the VCSE sector.
- Develop ethical and responsible AI support pathways for charitable organisations.
- Strengthen resilience, climate action and community wellbeing initiatives.
- Evidence the Impact of VCSE sector and increase awareness of sector and its work via social media.
- Continue to champion equity, inclusion and accessibility.
- Work with funders to develop support packages tied to funding.

Support and thanks



Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester is very grateful for the support provided by our Board of Trustees, the hard work, knowledge and commitment from our staff team, volunteers and the invaluable contributions our freelancers, pro bono consultants and work placements give.

We would like to thank the following organisations that we have gained support from:

NAVCA, NCVO and Charity Excellence.

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For restricted funding for specific projects:

Anglian Building Products, Arun District Council, Care Unbound trading as Here, City Fibre, National Lottery Awards for All, NHS Sussex, South Downs National Park Authority, Sussex Community Foundation, The Chalk Cliff Trust, University of Sussex and West Sussex County Council and to our partners Community People, Community Works, Diversity Resource International and The Trust for Developing Communities for distributing funding for specific projects.