

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024/ 2025



Supporting the voluntary and community sector in Dudley borough since 1974.

Our Vision, Mission and Values

At Dudley CVS, we are passionate about nurturing and supporting people and the communities they are part of to make a positive difference.



Our vision is for a borough with caring, vibrant, and strong communities where everyone can fulfil their potential.



Our mission is to connect, inspire, and work alongside people and organisations to build resilience and create positive change, while championing their value to partners and the wider community.

We work together to create a culture which places trust, integrity, humility and caring at the heart of what we do. These values guide our relationships with communities, partners, and each other, ensuring that our work is rooted in respect, collaboration, and authenticity.

In 2025, Dudley CVS was awarded the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA), a prestigious quality mark that recognises our impact in supporting voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations across Dudley borough.

The accreditation followed an independent assessment against NAVCA's four core functions of local infrastructure:

- **Leadership and Advocacy**
- **Partnerships and Collaboration**
- **Capacity Building**
- **Volunteering**

This report showcases our work through the lens of these four functions.



Volunteering

Building an environment in which volunteers and their communities thrive by encouraging and nurturing volunteering opportunities.



Leadership and Advocacy

Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening our sector's voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders.



Partnerships and Collaborations

Creating opportunities and driving effective joint working by building networks of local organisations and strategic partners.



Capacity Building

Providing practical support and development for local people and organisations, to nurture skills and build community resilience.

Building an environment in which volunteers and their communities thrive by encouraging and nurturing volunteering opportunities.

We're committed to creating an environment where volunteers and communities can flourish by encouraging and nurturing meaningful opportunities to give time and make a difference. We promote volunteering, break down barriers, and support those who lead and coordinate volunteers, so that getting involved is inclusive, accessible, and rewarding.



"All these activities are enjoyable and help improve my mental health. I've learned new skills, met amazing people, and feel more connected to my community." Volunteer

Reinventing and rejuvenating the Dudley Volunteer Centre

We recognise that the nature of volunteering is changing, both locally and nationally. A combination of digital advances, the cost-of-living crisis, shrinking workforces, rising health and wellbeing challenges, cross-cultural needs, and other drivers means that Dudley borough needs to explore how to engage, motivate, and retain volunteers.

Since June 2024, Dudley CVS's Volunteer Centre has been undergoing a period of reinvention and rejuvenation. By aligning more closely with our Group Development team, the Volunteer Centre aims to strengthen its role as the first port of call for individuals interested in volunteering and for groups looking to improve their recruitment and support of volunteers.

In addition to this, we have reaffirmed our commitment to ensuring that opportunities are inclusive, diverse, and accessible to everyone across the borough, regardless of their individual, social, economic, or cultural backgrounds or contexts.

Our progress so far has included:

- Developing a borough-wide volunteering strategy to nurture a sector offering great opportunities for everyone.
- Increasing visibility in communities through weekly drop-ins for new volunteers, face-to-face meetings with groups, and attendance at community events.
- Connecting with other Volunteer Centres to share ideas and mutual support.
- Building relationships with statutory partners such as Job Centres, Dudley Council, the NHS, and Dudley College.
- Refreshing the Volunteer Centre webpage and volunteer registration forms.
- Creating an internal volunteer policy to ensure Dudley CVS leads by example.

Over the past year, the Volunteer Centre has seen significant growth in the number of organisations receiving support, resulting in **120 new volunteering roles across 59 groups**. We have also introduced systems to improve understanding of the volunteer journey, from enquiry through to placement. We are now approached not just by organisations seeking volunteers, but also by those wishing to collaborate with us on volunteering projects. A recent example is our joint work with DK Rugby Club to host a volunteer fair, which attracted overwhelming interest from community groups. Momentum is also building behind our vision for a borough-wide volunteering strategy, with **10 organisations expressing interest in signing up or contributing**.



We connected Tony to a range of opportunities to stay active in his community, including volunteering at the hospital with Healthwatch Dudley, supporting our social prescribing service as a telephone befriender, hosting his own show on Black Country Radio Xtra, and helping with litter picks at Friends of Russells Hall Park. Tony has also been involved in a range of groups and activities, including leading a men's evening session at Harry's Cafe in Brierley Hill.



"Dudley CVS has been super helpful in finding me some amazing opportunities. I'm now working with Black Country Radio, both broadcasting on Black Country Xtra and doing some more behind-the-scenes... I'm also litter picking locally, which I enjoy because it helps keep my own neighbourhood where I live and walk my dogs much nicer... All these activities are enjoyable, and help improve my somewhat shaky mental health..."

Tony, Volunteer



Nurturing and inspiring volunteers across our work

Alongside supporting volunteering in the wider community, we involve volunteers in our own projects, initiatives, and services. Volunteers bring enthusiasm, creativity, and compassion, helping us to shape ideas, gather feedback, deliver activities, and provide direct support to the people and communities we serve.

Developing a volunteer programme to support clients of Integrated Plus

Since September 2024, Dudley CVS has designed and developed a structured volunteer programme supporting clients of our Integrated Plus social prescribing service. Volunteers provide companionship, accompany clients to appointments and group activities, and assist with session delivery. As part of this work, we have designed a comprehensive volunteer induction training programme and volunteer handbook to support consistency and quality.

Three key roles were created to enhance client support:

- **Telephone Buddy** – offering regular calls for companionship and emotional support
- **Community Buddy** – accompanying clients to appointments, community groups, or local activities
- **Group Volunteer** – assisting with the delivery of group sessions and events


This programme is designed to provide meaningful emotional support, reduce loneliness and isolation, and help clients build confidence. By March 2025, five people had already expressed interest in joining the volunteer team, demonstrating the programme's potential.

Exploring access to dental services in Dudley borough

Over the year, our Healthwatch Dudley volunteers played a key role in research to help improve services.


We worked with Dudley Council's Children and Young People's Public Health Team to contact every dental practice in the borough that offers NHS dental appointments.

We wanted to discover what it was like to find an NHS dental appointment. Our staff and volunteers called 40 dental practices, presenting as a local person looking to make an appointment.

 Volunteers were invaluable in conducting these calls. By reaching out directly to services as well as listening to patients' experiences, we were able to produce real data to support issues raised by local people.

Key findings:

 **Dental practices prioritise urgent appointments over routine check-ups.**

 **75% of practices offered a private routine appointment when there were no NHS routine appointments available.**

Read the full report here: tinyurl.com/4bb72a4j

Inspiring volunteer-led climate action: Bringing the Stour to Life

In April 2024, through our CoLab Dudley work on community-led climate action, we ran a short weekly series of Climate Changemaker peer learning sessions. Through this, local resident Colin developed a project called Bringing the Stour to Life. We held regular peer support check-ins with Colin as he developed the project.



Colin reached out to a variety of organisations to test the appetite for a collaborative, community-led project. In early November, 14 people joined the first in-person gathering of the project, at the source of the Stour - St Kenelm's in Romsley. Over the course of a few online sessions, the group agreed that their first activity would be to develop an understanding of the river through observing and surveying the length of the river. Using a purpose-built mobile app, volunteers collected observations, notes, and photographs to build a good understanding of the river's health, history, and features.

This volunteer-led, collaborative project brings people together both online and by the river to introduce, improve, enjoy, protect, and preserve the river. They are actively organising, initiating, and collaborating on projects, activities, and events, engaging

volunteers, holding themselves open to ideas, and working across political and organisational boundaries for the benefit of the river.

One ambition of this community-led project is to work with the communities along the course of the River Stour to establish a new recognised 'Stour Way' long distance walking path. The river flows through 30 miles of urban and rural areas. Using existing paths and working with landowners where needed, the Stour Way will connect communities with nature and the river's cultural heritage. It will provide accessible opportunities for health and wellbeing, fitness, and connectivity.



Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening our sector's voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders.

We mobilise communities, amplify diverse voices, and strengthen the local voluntary sector's influence on decision-makers and funders. We create opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to shape services and drive positive change.



Achieving the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA)

In January 2025, Dudley CVS achieved the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA), a prestigious quality mark that recognises excellence in supporting voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

We were assessed against NAVCA's four functions of local infrastructure, including **leadership and advocacy, partnerships and collaboration, capacity building, and volunteering**. We exceeded expectations in all four areas, showcasing our ability and dedication to nurturing vibrant communities, with "exceeds expectation" being the highest grade in the assessment.

Achieving the LIQA emphasises our dedication to delivering high-quality services and being responsive to the needs of the local voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector. It also reinforces our commitment to working collaboratively with partners, ensuring that we continue to play an essential role in the community.

The LIQA is a quality mark that provides assurance to local communities, voluntary and community organisations, and local strategic partners, funders, and commissioners. It represents trust and excellence, giving confidence that Dudley CVS is a dependable partner committed to achieving positive change.

With this accreditation, Dudley CVS stands as a beacon of trust and excellence, ready to embrace future opportunities and challenges in partnership with the communities it serves.

Supporting and advocating for the Voluntary Sector following local funding cuts

In early 2025, local voluntary sector organisations faced reduced income as a result of funding cuts from Dudley MBC.

Due to the financial pressures on the Local Authority, difficult decisions had to be made, resulting in cuts to several Council services as well as a number of voluntary sector organisations. Dudley CVS itself experienced a 62% reduction in core funding.

During this challenging period, Dudley CVS played a key role in supporting and advocating for the sector. We brought together affected organisations with Council colleagues to raise awareness of the impact these cuts would have on charities and residents across the borough. It was also important to ensure that charities had the opportunity to provide feedback on Dudley MBC's approach.

Looking forward, Dudley CVS will continue to champion the sector. Plans are in place to work with the new senior directors and the Chief Executive of Dudley MBC to collaborate, build back stronger, explore new ways of working, and ensure a thriving, sustainable voluntary sector for the future.

Amplifying voices to influence change

We create opportunities for people of all ages to be heard, valued, and included. Our collaborative approach ensures communities can actively shape the services and decisions that impact their lives.

Empowering young people to lead and advocate

Through the Dudley Young Health Champions (DYHC) programme, we empower young people to take the lead and create thought-provoking projects on issues that matter to them. Every DYHC project is shaped to nurture leadership, advocate for young people's rights, and provide a platform for their voices to be heard.

Across the year, DYHC projects have covered mental health, body image, consent, bullying, anxiety, sleep, Prevent, and climate change. In September 2024, the DYHC cohort at Here4YOUth created a three-minute animation on consent, now used in waiting rooms to educate other young people. The cohort is now developing a PSHE consent pack to open a wider dialogue for students across the borough.

Partnerships are central to the programme's success. During the year, we have collaborated with Here4YOUth, Ekho Collective, Public Health, the Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB), Dudley Council, NHS Trust, Reflections, Black Country Food Bank, and Routes.

The DYHC programme enriches young people's lives by encouraging them to strive for and achieve their hopes, dreams, and aspirations, while also influencing real change in their communities.

“I became a DYHC last year and ever since then, I have felt like I have this power to make real change, to be productive in a world that used to feel hopeless... It has helped me so much being a part of this initiative, and I am so passionate about all the topics we can bring to light that may have gone unnoticed. Being a DYHC means being an advocate for youth voice, and it brings me great personal satisfaction every time I am involved.”

Pheobe, DYHC @ Here4YOUth



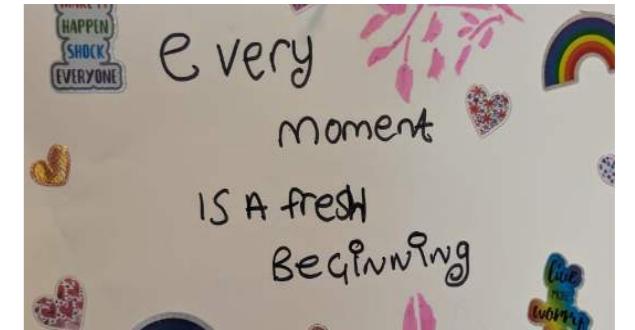
We gather and amplify people's experiences to influence health and care services, drive improvements, and inform local decision-making.

Exploring experiences of care homes and supported living facilities

During the year, Healthwatch Dudley worked with the Dudley Quality Partnership to identify care homes and supported living facilities to visit and gather the experiences of residents and their relatives. This work has been carried out using legal Enter & View powers, which allow Healthwatch to visit health and social care settings, observe care, and speak with patients, visitors, and their loved ones.

We carried out Enter & View visits to three care homes and one supported living facility. These visits focused on identifying what's working well and where improvements could be made, based on the feedback of residents and their families.

A common theme emerged across all settings, the importance of choice in everyday life. Residents valued having a choice in food, activities, where they spent their time, and, if required, how they received



care. Some people were happy with the range of activities provided, while others wanted more variety and choice.

Following each visit, we published a report with clear, actionable recommendations. Facilities responded positively, with the majority viewing the visits as a valuable opportunity to improve care and committing to make changes. This demonstrates how Enter & View can drive service improvements through collaboration.

Changes have included, communicating more frequently with loved ones via email, updating décor and exploring more varied activities.

“Carers are underrated and don't get enough credit for the hard job they do.”
Family member

Cultivating community-led action

We cultivate community-led action, empowering people to think differently and reimagine the places they live, work, and play in.

Dudley Creates: a 100 Year Cultural Strategy in Action


In Autumn 2021, our CoLab Dudley team embarked on an 18-month journey to research and co-create a cultural strategy for the borough, supported by Creative Black Country and Arts Council England. We developed a long-term strategy, seeking to expand an understanding of what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it, and who experiences it, to include future generations.

Dudley Creates is a 100 Year Cultural Strategy in Action. Strategy in action means that we're honest about not knowing all the answers, and instead, we seek to create the conditions where creatives, communities, and others in our local cultural ecosystem are free to creatively explore questions together that might help us imagine futures into being. A 100-year time frame helps to disrupt the usual concentrations of organisational power, expanding who has responsibility for the cultural landscape to a much wider web of people.


Having spent six years convening local creatives, designers, and makers, we were able to quickly mobilise 12 creative leads and 6 creative collaborators to shape a programme of 22 cultural activities over the winter, when we were approached by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to do so.

While CoLab Dudley has a creative space on Dudley High Street, WMCA asked us to create an 'Urban Room' at Provision House. This created an opportunity to bring creativity to a local non-arts space.


The local creatives we worked with spread their activities across both locations, with a space available at Provision House during weekdays, and a pop-up Urban Room at CoLab Dudley on evenings and weekends.

 *"It was interesting for Time To Make to use Provision House. Although it's on the same High Street as CoLab Dudley, it has different people, communities, and footfall. This introduced us to using different spaces on the High Street."* Becky Thompson, local creative.

Over 130 participation opportunities were taken up (of 350 available) over 4 months, by an estimated 80 local people. In addition, 5 collective enquiry sessions took place between late October and late March, and a celebratory event and exhibition of artworks created by local people through Urban Rooms Dudley activities at the end of April was attended by around 40 people.

 *One of the signs of a flourishing cultural ecosystem, which we were mindful of and worked towards during this funded project, included place-based social practice. In building trusting relationships with local collaborators and communities, the activities offered were informed by local knowledges, stories, histories, and futures. The Urban Rooms work has helped to bring more creatives into relationship who we will continue collaborating with.*

100 Ways to be a Good Ancestor

 *We all want to be a good ancestor—we want to help create a better world for our children, their children, and their grandchildren. The hard bit is that this requires long-term thinking. Roman Krznaric, author of The Good Ancestor, describes our society as being "in an age of pathological short-termism."*


Some of the risks of climate breakdown and temperature rises for communities in Dudley, particularly neighbourhoods in the northern part of the borough, are overheating, drought, and flooding. Mitigating risks like these and likely increases in food shortages and the cost of living requires longer-term thinking and a deeper understanding of the place we live in. The land, water, air, and other species. In 2024, we embarked on a collaboratively designed journey around climate action with local people.

Through Stories of Place (which pays attention to Dudley High Street), our CoLab Dudley researcher has been working with local people to co-create the Dudley Time Portal, supported by community technologists Common Knowledge. The aim is to create a living archive of creative artefacts and experiments from the past, present, and future of Dudley Borough that lasts for 100 years.

Through Getting Into Hot Water, local social artists from Amblecote based Workshop 24 are inviting local people to consider water and climate change in Dudley. In a series of workshops during the summer, local people, including those who are neurodivergent, spent time away from the everyday by a pond, to slow down, and notice the natural world in a busy urban landscape. Creative activities included focused conversation, deep listening, guided visualisation, drawing, photography, and underwater filming.

Brierley Hill based Ekho Collective CIC created invitations through five Growing Land Connections projects. Participants of Tending People, Place, and Planet have been learning about ways to combine people care, earth care, and future care. They have developed a shared climate action plan for a wellbeing garden. Another group of people has been Reclaiming Our Roots, resurfacing and sharing forgotten knowledge of plants that grow around us. These activities are supported through the Climate Action Fund (National Lottery Community Fund).

Over 300 people took part in the activities with over 282 other kinds of living beings and habitats as learning companions. Their actions, inspiration, and learnings were shared in an exhibition of 100 Ways to be a Good Ancestor in winter 2024. People said the benefits of pondering included an increased appreciation of water and ponds within the natural world locally, shared learning about biodiversity, developed artistic skills, engagement with natural heritage, and an improved sense of wellbeing. A Stories of Place co-creator said:

 *"I think there are now more opportunities through just being in this space, coming to the workshops, testing and learning in a safe space..."*

Through this work, we hope that more people in the borough will get involved in joyful, collective, and individual climate action and deepen their connection with the rest of nature. We also seek to support the spread of locally relevant and practically applied climate and ecological knowledge, to help local ecosystems and communities that rely on them to flourish.

Creating opportunities and driving effective joint working by building networks of local organisations and strategic partners

We strengthen connections across the sector and create spaces for collaboration. By building trust and relationships, we help local organisations, statutory bodies, businesses, and residents work together towards shared goals. These connections help build local capacity, encourage collaborative projects, and deliver positive outcomes for communities across the borough.

Creating spaces for connection: Welcome to the Sector

Dudley CVS's Group Development Team supports not-for-profit organisations at every stage of their journey. From April 2024 to March 2025, our work focused on bringing new people into the sector, whether as donors, supporters, trustees, corporate sponsors, ambassadors, or volunteers. We aimed to showcase the fantastic work of local good causes and celebrate their diversity.

Welcome to the Sector events provided groups with a platform to share their work and connect with other not-for-profits, partners, potential volunteers, and supporters. Each event began with an introduction to the sector, followed by presentations from local organisations about their work. Sessions ended with a networking opportunity, allowing participants to make connections, swap details, and offer mutual support.


These events have led to meaningful partnerships and collaborations. One example is The Goodwill Revolution, a new organisation that linked up with Black Country Foodbank and Kids Clothes Project during our Brierley Hill session.


“Beyond compliance, Dudley CVS has also opened doors for us, connecting us with some truly amazing people who work closely with families throughout the Black Country. These connections are vital to our mission. We rely on referrals from trusted individuals within the community to identify those most in need of our support. The relationships Dudley CVS has helped us build with these frontline workers will be instrumental in ensuring we reach the people who need us most.”

The Goodwill Revolution

Over the year, Welcome to the Sector has:

 Raised the profile of at least **52** voluntary and community groups.

 Brought together **143** people from sector organisations, partners, residents, and businesses, leading to more than **20** longer-term connections.

 Supported our trustee recruitment initiative: **5** people from statutory partner organisations have joined us to connect with sector organisations. **3** have since become charity trustees, and one is currently in recruitment.

“Thank you very much for inviting me to such an informative gathering. I was able to briefly speak with a few invitees about their experiences in providing services to their communities and understand the happiness they derived from their efforts. I would like to continue my dialogue with a few of those I spoke with regarding challenges faced. I would also love to attend such interactive events in the future.”

New group


“It was great to meet you and your colleagues and to hear from so many wonderful organisations yesterday. What an inspirational event! ...it will be really helpful for me to continue to make connections, so would be very happy to attend more of your meetings.”


ICB colleague


Building networks that last with peer support for parents and caregivers

In April 2024, Dudley Council commissioned Dudley CVS, as part of the Start for Life Programme and Family Hub Network, to develop a new peer support offer for parents and caregivers in Dudley.


Working in partnership with the not-for-profit sector and Family Hubs, we established peer support groups for parents, grandparents, and caregivers across the borough. The programme catered for parents and caregivers during the crucial first 1001 days of a child's life, while also reaching underserved groups in Dudley, including adoptive parents, LGBTQ+ families, grandparents, single parents, and dads.


 **14,471** people attended peer support groups, helping to build a vital community of support.


 **Kaylee, a single mom of two, often felt overwhelmed when going out with her children, worried that others were judging her. After joining a peer support group, she began to open up and talk with other parents and volunteers about how to cope. Kaylee's story highlights that single parents have a unique experience that may require additional support and understanding. By providing tailored peer support, single parents can grow in confidence.**

 **"The group has provided me with social support at a time that is wonderful and life changing but at times incredibly challenging."**
Moms Mindful Hub attendee

As the peer support groups became more established and regular, we were able to capture stories and data that measured their impact.


 Participants told us how the groups had improved their wellbeing.

 Engagement from single parents and dads significantly increased, highlighting the demand for support to be available.


 During the programme, **114** volunteers supported the peer support groups.

The programme reflected our commitment to building capacity within the sector and our dedication to collaborating with trusted partners to achieve meaningful outcomes and drive positive change.

One of the key legacies of the programme is the thriving network of collaboration and support between community groups, demonstrating the importance and lasting impact of this work.

 **"The peer support is paramount for new parents in Dudley. Many have stated they would feel lost without the groups and support from other parents."**
Generation Impact volunteer

Our vision for Dudley is the creation of a 'community that cares for each other', one where parents and caregivers are supported to give their children the best possible start in life, one that enhances their future outcomes, particularly among communities and groups that currently receive less support. Working in partnership, we can foster a community with a thriving support network that serves to enhance the lives of all children, young people and families in Dudley.

 **"I really just want to thank you for welcoming us into such a special group. Your dedication, care and thoughtfulness really doesn't go unnoticed. This group has been a lifeline for me and my mental health."**
Moms Mindful Hub attendee

Working together to tackle inequalities

We work closely with local organisations and community groups to strengthen support networks and services. By listening to voices that are often unheard, we aim to remove barriers and promote inclusion.

Using Technology to Break Down Language Barriers

Through Healthwatch Dudley, we aim to hear feedback from people who are seldom heard, including those for whom English is not their first language. Language barriers can make it difficult for people to communicate their concerns and provide feedback on health and care services.

We visited multiple groups attending Dudley Adult Learning, including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and Key Skills sessions. Many attendees were from refugee and migrant communities. Using Google Translate and guidance from ESOL tutors, we conducted surveys to capture feedback and lived experiences. The project had several key impacts:

- Both ESOL students and Healthwatch staff improved their ability to use technology for translation.
- Feedback was successfully gathered from people who might otherwise have struggled to have their voices heard.
- Knowledge of translation tools has been shared with Healthwatch volunteers and community members, helping them communicate effectively in the future.

Reflecting on this work, we saw that simple, free technological solutions can remove barriers and make a real difference for communities. This approach is easily replicable and builds confidence in both staff and service users.


Growing voluntary sector support for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers

Refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants are the most vulnerable members of society and often face discrimination, substandard living, housing and working conditions, and inadequate or restricted access to mainstream health services.

Since 2022, Dudley CVS has been facilitating a voluntary sector migrant network, which enables organisations supporting migrants to come together to collaborate.

 In Autumn 2024, a new migrant connect grants programme was launched, whereby **10** new projects were funded to promote inclusion, community cohesion, education, and health.

Activities and services include physical activity programmes, ESOL classes, advice and support, drop-in clubs, and peer groups.

 **"This collaboration opened up more referral routes for GPs and other health professionals who were previously struggling to find the right support services for migrants they were in contact with."** Dudley CVS

Tackling poverty across Dudley borough

Mobilising the voluntary sector to distribute the Household Support Fund to the most vulnerable

Over the past 6 years, Dudley CVS has mobilised the voluntary sector on behalf of Dudley MBC to help reach the most vulnerable people living in Dudley borough who face poverty and hardship, and to distribute the Household Support Fund (HSF).



Charities that come into contact with and support people in financial hardship, including Black Country Foodbank, Provision House, Brierley Hill Baby Bank, and Barnardos received funding via Dudley CVS to reach those in greatest need.



Over six years **£560,000** has been allocated to people in need via the voluntary sector helping Dudley MBC to evidence the value of HSF to the Government. The number of sector instances of support to people equates to 20,878.



For 2025/26, **£100,000** was given out in grant payments helping 1,645 households enabling provisions such as food parcels, equipment for infants and white goods for individuals and families in financial hardship.

Barnardos delivers several therapeutic services around children and young people's mental health needs to try and help them build emotional resilience, navigate the traumas they have experienced, and empower them to believe in themselves and a brighter future.



“With most services, we need to build relationships with parents so that they are comfortable with the support we offer their children. In this process, we become aware of the family situation and any struggles or issues. Connecting, inspiring, and working alongside people and organisations to achieve resilience and positive change.”

Being able to advise them of the Household Support Fund and also provide this to them directly, is wonderful... Often, the thought of having to reach out for more support can feel difficult for families, they may feel shame, feel judged, feel a failure, and we have been able to reassure them that none of these are true and that so many people are struggling...

Parents have been having to use credit cards and loan sharks to be able to provide food for the family, and we have been able to prevent many families from getting into such debt, and difficult and dangerous situations for the whole family. Parents have said how much anxiety and worry they have around making their money last, and that this causes their emotional and mental health to suffer. We have been able to relieve that potential stress for each family we have supported.

We have been able to ensure that families have appropriate clothing, thus preventing potential illness in such cold weather and preventing getting into debt with heating bills. We have been able to provide essential items such as a bed to prevent a young child from having to sleep on the floor, and an air fryer to save on electricity and make their budget go further.” Barnardos

Provision House, a charity and social enterprise in Dudley, helps individuals and families facing hardship by providing essential household items, food, and support services. The charity has supported many people facing financial difficulties via the Household Support Fund.



Andrea and her three children became homeless after being asked to leave her father's home. She was rehomed by the council but had no furniture of her own to take with her. She bought beds for the children and left the purchasing of household appliances until she could perhaps afford them. Through the Household Support Fund, Provision House assisted Andrea by providing a washing machine and a gas cooker. This has made a huge difference to the family's situation, as paying laundrette costs from her small income had lessened her chances to save up for the items. Andrea said the new appliances eased her worries and allowed her to cook meals for her children, and it had provided a more solid base for them for the future.

Colin was referred through The Food Club at Provision House for support due to him using a broken fridge for some time.



“I have been using a bag of frozen peas and sometimes bags of ice to keep my fridge cool. I have to take a lot of medication, and some are kept in the fridge. I contacted Provision House, who told me about the Household Support Fund and offered to provide a new fridge freezer. It makes a massive difference to me. I am happy I can now do a proper food shop, which will help me save money and be healthy.”



David is a single parent with a low income and significant health concerns. On learning that his two daughters were taking it in turns to sleep on the settee whilst the other slept on the floor, he was **provided with two new beds, which have made a massive difference to his family.**

Providing practical support and development for local people and organisations, to nurture skills and build community resilience.

Capacity building is about giving people and organisations the support, training, and guidance they need to develop the skills, knowledge, and resources to operate efficiently, strongly, and independently.

Through our services, we also support individuals to strengthen their capacity, helping them to build skills, improve wellbeing and resilience, enabling them to play an active role in their communities.

Supporting groups and organisations to build capacity

Dudley CVS's group development team works with all types of not-for-profits and people interested in setting up new not-for-profits to help them become strong, efficient, and sustainable.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, our group development team provided one-to-one support to **148** groups, assisting with governance, legal compliance, volunteering, funding, and leadership.

- **59** – supported with good practice with volunteering
- **42** – supported to set up and register as a not-for-profit organisation.
- **24** were supported with governance and received training and / or guidance on the legal responsibilities of charity trustees, company / CIC directors, or committee members
- **34** groups were supported with legal compliance, which includes topics like health and safety, safeguarding, insurance, and reporting to the Charity Commission
- **116** leaders (committee members, directors, trustees) have been supported in their roles. 69 of those were new and supported into their new roles. We also worked with 12 people interested in becoming charity trustees.
- **36** groups were supported with funding and finance, including topics such as financial management, income generation, fundraising, and applying for funding

£1,554,961

Over the year, our support unlocked **£1,554,961** in grant funding for **39** groups.



11 directly supported with their funding applications received **£1,063,290** this year.



Our contribution to supporting not-for-profits to set up, govern themselves efficiently, and increase their planning and fundraising skills has seen **29** of them access **£491,671** this year.

This year's Welcome to the Sector attendees said:



"Overall, the support has been a game-changer for us. It has provided the foundation we needed to grow, and the approachable nature of the team has made navigating challenges much easier."

Without a Trace CIC



"While we haven't needed the same level of intense support since 2016, the foundations and basic structures put in place have served us well. We have since been able to enhance and extend these, including adding new policies and procedures as we've grown..." Welcome Group Halesowen

How our long-term support nurtures groups: Cadrene Supported Living

In the previous financial year, our team began working with a group committed to improving the lives of marginalised and vulnerable people living in poverty in and around Dudley town centre.

The group had already established a company, Cadrene Supported Living, and was providing accommodation to a small number of people. They aspired to work more holistically, tackling issues such as poor housing and rogue landlords, access to basic healthcare services, benefits support, and loneliness and isolation.

The team had trusted people on board with experience working in the community, good insight into the people they wanted to support, and a passion for improving lives. What the team lacked was focus. Cadrene Supported Living had previously tried to register as a charity but had been unsuccessful.



We facilitated sessions to help the team collectively dream about what they want to achieve, articulate their 'why', and develop a high-level plan. This helped us support them to develop their charitable purposes and their application to the Charity Commission. We provided training for trustees on their legal responsibilities to prepare them for their new roles. We were also on hand to support and review their application to the Charity Commission. In June 2024, they were successful in becoming a registered charity.



"WE HAVE DONE IT and a very big THANK YOU – we would never have achieved it without your help and support."

Cadrene Supported Living

Throughout the process, the trustees embraced every step, gaining confidence in talking about their charity and its 'public benefit'. This has stood them in great stead going into this financial year and has helped them to:



Communicate their work with clarity and secure further support, including presenting at July's Welcome to the Sector event.



Successfully apply for a **£20,000** grant from Awards for All.



Move to a new hub on New Street, Dudley, which opened in November 2024.



Become winners at our Community Action Awards in October and active members of Dudley CVS.



"We were honoured to be invited to the opening of Cadrene's new hub and to meet some of the volunteers and communities the charity supports. It was gratifying to see how welcoming and empathic staff and volunteers were towards everyone. It's clear they have built trusted relationships and that this charity provides some hope for people on the margins of society."

Group development team, Dudley CVS



Ensuring our local venues remain vibrant cultural hubs for the local community

We are committed to ensuring our venues remain vibrant cultural hubs for the local community for many years to come. Through the transformation of Brierley Hill Civic and DY1, we aim to provide inclusive and sustainable spaces for both local people and organisations. Over the last decade, we have reinvigorated both venues with a new lease of life to benefit the local community and our partners.



During the last year, with grants from the Commonwealth Games Inclusive Community Fund (£100k) and Enovert Community Trust (£35k), we've made significant improvements to the **Brierley Hill Civic**, including renovated toilet facilities, refurbished backstage dressing rooms, and an upgraded lighting system. These improvements build on previous upgrades since we took on day-to-day management, such as a refurbished bar, cold rooms, an advanced sound system, a removable indoor marquee tent, a 7x4m screen with an HDMI projector, renovated ground floor seating, and redecoration, among many other enhancements that our Civic team has incorporated.



Our **DY1 venue** has also recently reached new heights, thanks to a £50k grant from Enovert Community Trust. It has been elevated from looking tired and outdated to a significantly modernised and improved multi-use venue space, now featuring new flooring, an advanced state-of-the-art audio-visual system, event lighting, much-improved bar facilities, plus the addition of new windows and blinds, redecorated foyer, toilets, and main hall.

These improvements not only enhance the visitor experience but also strengthen the capacity of local organisations and community groups who hire the spaces, giving them access to professional, modern facilities to deliver their activities.

The community has played a crucial role in these transformations. Feedback from regular visitors and hirers has been invaluable, guiding many of our renovation decisions. Their insights have significantly shaped the improvements, leading to an enhancement in visitor experience and a shift in how the venues are perceived. Our facilities are now much more high-quality, with the added benefit of environmentally friendly features.

Throughout the renovations at both venues, we have been committed to our climate action goals and sustainability, with eco-friendly features like water-saving urinals, quick-flush systems, energy-efficient LED lighting, and double-glazed windows, aligning with our dedication to reducing our environmental impact.

Recent feedback has stated that these improvements have much improved the experience of customers. The Civic has over 260 event days booked for the next year, while DY1 continues to attract weekly hires.

Our journey doesn't end here. Looking to the future, we plan to enhance these spaces even more. At Brierley Hill Civic, we aim to refurbish the kitchenette, transforming it into a full working kitchen to provide hot food at events. DY1's outdoor areas are set for significant improvements. Our vision is for these venues to become the go-to places in our community and partners.

Supporting groups to become sustainable to ensure our community continues to thrive


Dudley CVS provides support, training, and guidance to people, groups, and organisations, ensuring they possess the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to operate efficiently, confidently, and independently.


Our Integrated Plus social prescribing service plays a crucial role in this ecosystem. A thriving community is essential for providing a diverse range of options when working with clients.


Our “Spring into Action: Grow through What You Go Through” social prescribing micro-grants programme enables community members to develop projects contributing to Dudley becoming nurturing, caring, vibrant and strong. The programme provides financial support for small groups to deliver community projects, whilst our group development team work with them to ensure their sustainability.

During the year, we have commissioned organisations to deliver social prescribing prescriptions based on gaps and needs identified by our Social Prescribing Link Workers.

During the year, from the Spring into Action budget of £50,000:

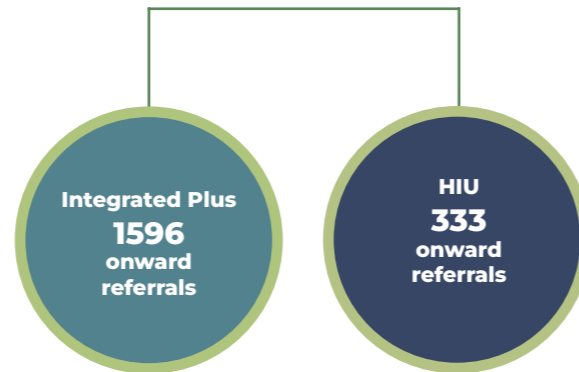
 **26** applications were received from 14 CIC's or not for profit organisations.

 **19** grants were awarded (average grant awarded £2,650)

 **85** Integrated Plus clients supported in SIA sessions since September 2024

Over the year:

1596 onward referrals to organisations were made by the **Integrated Plus and High Intensity User (HIU) team** and **333** referrals were made to services.



Supporting individuals to strengthen their capacity

We support individuals to improve their wellbeing and resilience, helping them to build their capacity to connect and play an active role in their communities.


Improving wellbeing through Social Prescribing


During the year, our Integrated Plus social prescribing team has continued to support individuals who frequently visit their GP, are at higher risk of hospital admission, or may be vulnerable and could benefit from social prescribing interventions. We aim to understand each person's needs and work together to find solutions to their challenges and opportunities to become more connected and involved in their community to enhance their wellbeing.

Adam was referred to Integrated Plus by his GP after experiencing low mood and isolation.

 Following a heart attack and time off work, he struggled with anxiety and lacked local family support. His social prescribing link worker helped him connect with Citizens Advice, Tough Enough to Care, and the Riverside House workshops. He began attending creative sessions at Riverside House, where he discovered a passion for glasswork. Over time, he grew in confidence, found new ways to cope with stress, and started to build connections with others facing similar challenges. He described the workshops as “phenomenal – almost like a weekly reset,” and said the experience helped him rediscover a creative side he never knew he had. Today, Adam feels more resilient and is considering volunteering or even becoming an ambassador for social prescribing.

Bill was supported through the Integrated Plus High Intensity User (HIU) service.

 Bill was one of the Trust's most frequent users. He struggled with alcohol dependency, unmanaged diabetes, and severe mental health issues. Bill faced complex challenges including childhood trauma, marital breakdown, unstable housing, long-term sickness, and isolation. With support from Integrated Plus's HIU link worker, Bill began to rebuild structure in his life. He engaged in weekly meetings, received emotional support, and started attending alcohol support groups. He also used BRIC funding to attend an AA convention and to work on publishing his autobiography, a meaningful outlet for self-expression and recovery. After six months of sobriety, Bill experienced a relapse, leading to homelessness and a hospital admission. He later spent 10 weeks in mental health inpatient care, but remained connected to our link worker throughout. Over eight months, Bill made significant progress. He expressed that he had improved mental health, social connections, and engagement in meaningful activities. He has since launched a mental health podcast and published the first part of his autobiography.

 “The Integrated Plus service has been fantastic – I give it five stars. I’m seeing friends again, getting out more, and feeling more active.” Bill

Providing support to unpaid carers

During the year, our Carers Coordinator has continued to support carers, listen to their needs, and connect them with appropriate services so they can receive the support needed to continue in their caring roles.

Insights we've gathered from these interactions over the years played a crucial role in helping Russells Hall Hospital to secure funding to develop an information hub located in the front reception, designed to identify family carers in an informal, non-clinical way.

In September 2024, the Information Hub opened and now serves as a central point of information for patients, carers, and staff, providing resources, advice, and support from a wide range of local charities and organisations. This collaborative effort between health, social care, and the voluntary sector ensures that carers are no longer invisible, that their voices are heard, and that the quality of support they receive is strengthened.

The establishment of the Information Hub marks a significant milestone in a decade-long journey, ensuring carers continue to have access to the support and information they need to navigate their roles effectively.

Helping people to unlock their passions, gifts, and talents

The Building Resilience In Communities (BRIC) Fund supports clients to improve their health and wellbeing and provides an opportunity to find a sense of purpose. The fund enables Integrated Plus to support clients to access items or services that can support the individual to flourish.

Since April 2024, **72** Integrated Plus clients have accessed and benefited from the BRIC fund. With a total expenditure of **£4578.44**, reducing the impact of financial inequalities for both Integrated Plus and High Intensity User clients.



Tom, a 71-year-old man living with multiple health conditions, was referred to Integrated Plus with poor mobility and low mood. His wife, Trish, who was his main carer, was also struggling with her own health issues and felt worn down by the demands of caring. Both shared a love of art, but neither had the motivation or resources to pursue it.

With the support of BRIC funding, Tom was introduced to art classes at The Art Yard, while Trish received a diamond art kit to rekindle her own creative interest. Attending the classes gave Tom a renewed sense of purpose and joy, and he has since prepared for an art exhibition. For Trish, having the space and materials to focus on her own wellbeing has made caring more manageable and less overwhelming.

Both Tom and Trish rediscovered their resilience and built new motivation for the future, proving how small, targeted support can have a transformative impact.

Providing Information to Change Lives

During the year, Black Country Foodbank commissioned Healthwatch Dudley to explore the needs of foodbank users, with a focus on providing guidance, signposting, and understanding what people wanted from local services.

We visited two foodbanks each week and spoke with over 100 people, listening to their stories and challenges.



John has a physical and mental health condition affecting his daily life and ability to work. Living in a council flat with his adult son, John faced poor living conditions, including mould and broken windows, and struggled to manage his finances.

Through our support:

- **John was provided with contact information for housing, benefits, and support services.**
- **His son's benefits were adjusted to a fortnightly schedule, easing financial pressure.**
- **Housing issues began to be addressed, including fixing the flat's window and starting mould removal.**
- **John and his son received guidance on managing finances and accessing additional support as carers.**
- **John reported feeling more in control of his life and better equipped to manage challenges:**



"I'll let you know if I need anything else, but I'll still come over and give you a smile each week."

We recognised that foodbank users often face complex, overlapping challenges. Providing dedicated support to navigate these systems can make a meaningful difference to wellbeing and independence.

Supporting Dad's experiencing challenges

Between 2024 and 2025, we hosted a 12-month pilot project, Dads Included, to engage with new dads in Dudley during their children's first 1001 days.

The project aimed to understand the landscape of fatherhood in Dudley and identify opportunities for support.

We supported Vic and his son, who were coping with significant past trauma.



Housed on a challenging fourth floor of an apartment building, daily tasks like managing a pushchair, a bike, shopping bags, and a toddler had become quite demanding. Vic faced challenges such as self-care and maintaining a healthy diet, and had experienced notable weight loss due to his demanding routine and lengthy bike commute to work.

We supported Vic with financial matters and budgeting and explored a potential application for Personal Independence Payment. In collaboration with Dudley CVS's Integrated Plus Social Prescribing team, we referred Vic to local peer support groups and the Connect Project's family support service. He has received help with clothing and essentials from the Baby Bank and the Kids Clothes Project, and grants for carpeting, a washer/dryer, and a new bike.



"Seeing Vic get out and about, engaging in groups and activities with his son has been a huge step forward from when we first met. He has grown in confidence and independence..."

Project worker, Dudley CVS



f [facebook.com/cvsdudley](https://www.facebook.com/cvsdudley) **t** [@DudleyCVS](https://twitter.com/DudleyCVS)

Dudley CVS, 7 Albion Street, Brierley Hill, DY5 3EE
t: 01384 573381 e: info@dudleycvs.org.uk

Registered charity No. 517766 incorporated under the 1995
Companies Act No 1998105