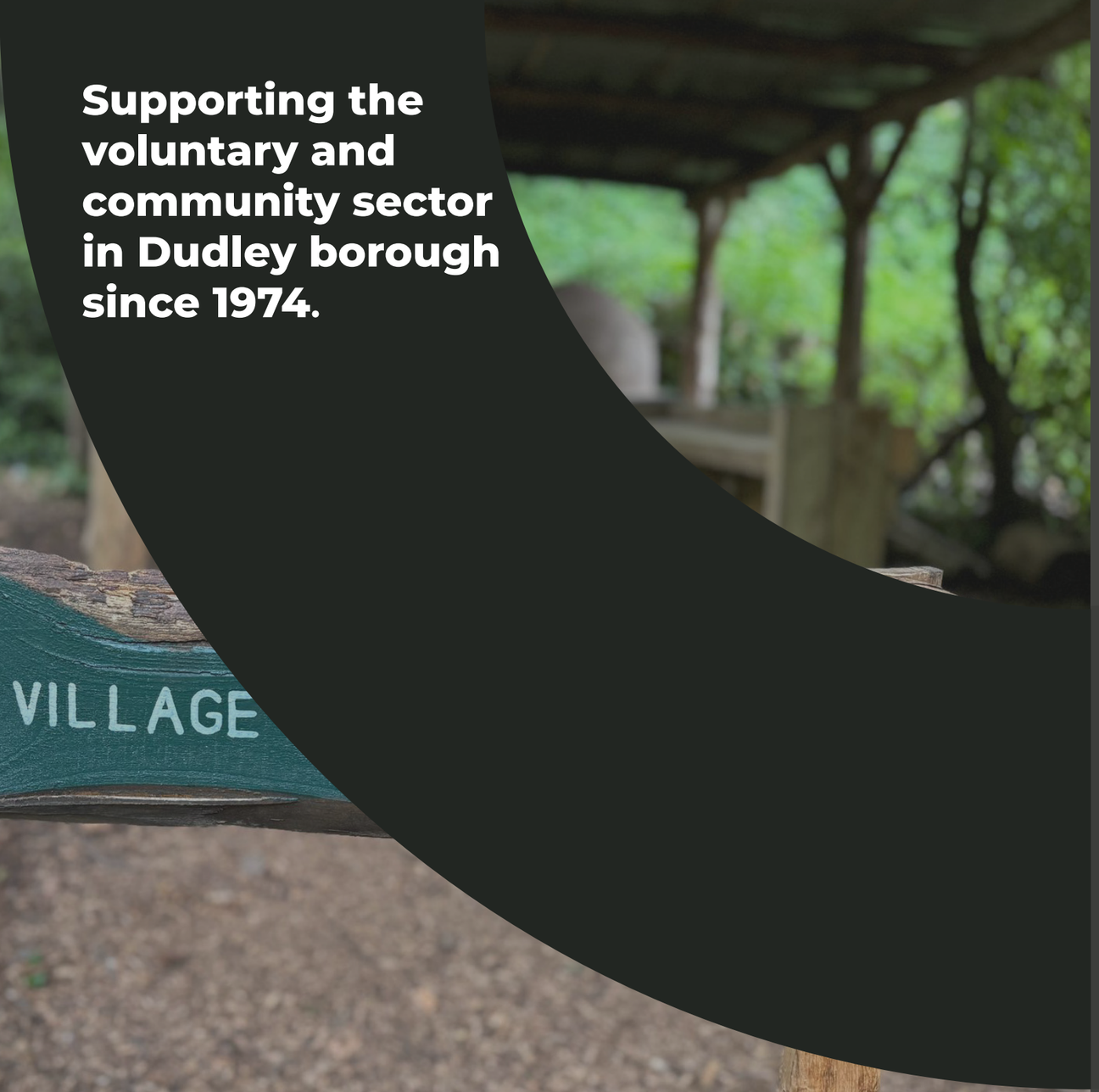
ANNUAL REVIEW 2025/2026

Dudley CVS



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.

Our work is guided by our culture and values, and the four functions of local infrastructure:

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

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.

Creating opportunities for people to give their time, share their skills and make a difference across Dudley borough



"Volunteering is a great way to help out, not only for others but for yourself. You really have nothing to lose and everything to gain." Volunteer

Dudley CVS's Volunteer Centre connects people across the borough with volunteering opportunities that match their time, skills, interests and experience. Through our work, we encourage and nurture volunteering while working with not-for-profit groups and organisations to promote volunteering, share good practice, and support effective volunteer management and development.

Over the year, **our Volunteer Centre has helped to develop and share 117 volunteering opportunities**.

398 people have received information about volunteering opportunities, with **215** joining our **Time to Give Where You Live** mailing list, offering one-off, commitment-free opportunities to support a range of good causes.

"I wanted to do something but didn't want to commit to a paid job because my confidence had really changed. Through volunteering I felt I had more control and less pressure...

Dudley Talking Therapies really stood out to me because I've used the service many times throughout my life and I have a strong interest in mental health. I was thrilled when I got an interview..."
Hayley, volunteer

"Hayley's journey is a fantastic example of how volunteering can support wellbeing, rebuild confidence and create positive pathways forward."
Volunteering Development Officer

Building confidence through volunteering

A successful partnership between Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and Dudley CVS is helping local people rebuild confidence and make a meaningful difference through volunteering.

Hayley's journey demonstrates how partnership working between community organisations, employment support services and the NHS can create positive opportunities for local people while strengthening local health services.

After attending Dudley Talking Therapies, Hayley was introduced to Dudley CVS through Integrated Plus and supported by Dudley Volunteer Centre. She was also receiving WorkWell support to help rebuild her confidence following the death of her husband.

Having previously worked for the NHS, Hayley wanted to take positive steps forward but didn't feel ready to return to paid employment. Instead, she looked for an opportunity that would allow her to reconnect with a workplace environment and move at a pace that felt right for her.

We worked closely with Hayley to understand her interests, experience and aspirations before identifying a role that suited her goals. A volunteer admin role with Dudley Talking Therapies immediately stood out because of her personal experience of using the service and her passion for mental health.

Now volunteering with the Dudley Talking Therapies admin team, Hayley prepares patient letters, scans documents and supports communication with GP practices. Volunteering has helped her feel part of a team again in a supportive environment.

Our partnership with Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is helping create accessible pathways into volunteering, employment and community engagement. This supports the wider ambitions of the NHS Volunteering for Health programme to widen access to volunteering opportunities and create more inclusive routes into health and care careers.

Nurturing volunteers across our work

Alongside supporting volunteering in the wider community, we involve volunteers in our own projects, initiatives, and services. Volunteers are a key part of a strong voluntary and community sector. They increase local capacity, strengthen community links and bring valuable lived experience.

Building a stronger volunteer offer to support community wellbeing

Dudley CVS's Integrated Plus service supports health and wellbeing through social prescribing.

We wanted to develop a volunteering offer that would both support Integrated Plus activity and create meaningful ways for local people to get involved.

Over the year, we promoted volunteering roles and invited expressions of interest from local residents. We began building a volunteer pathway, including recruitment, onboarding and ongoing support, and matched people into appropriate opportunities. **This resulted in 23 expressions of interest, with 6 volunteers actively engaged and 5 more in recruitment**.

This work has helped lay the foundations for a stronger volunteer infrastructure within Integrated Plus. It has increased local involvement in our work, created more capacity to support community activity and demonstrated clear interest from residents in volunteering. It also creates opportunities for volunteers to build confidence, develop skills and strengthen social connection.

Our aim is to build a sustainable volunteer offer that strengthens both our organisation and the wider community. In the future, this will help us increase local engagement, expand our reach and create more opportunities for residents to contribute to community wellbeing activity.

Healthwatch Dudley volunteers: making a difference

Healthwatch Dudley, hosted by Dudley CVS, is the independent champion for people using health and social care services across the borough. During the year, 12 Healthwatch Dudley volunteers gave 249 hours to support our work.

Their contribution helps us reach more people, dig deeper into service provision and support our community. Volunteers undertook a wide range of activities, including reviewing GP websites and social media, supporting activities at Russells Hall Hospital, checking GP practice and Patient Charter compliance, creating a 'What's On' booklet for parents and carers, and assessing website content and accessibility.

They also supported research projects, events and local activities, and helped upload our reports to online platforms. Three people completed our micro-volunteering challenge.

Being part of our team has given volunteers opportunities to gain confidence, develop knowledge through training and learn new skills.

"Thanks so much for the opportunities Healthwatch has provided. I'm really happy to help and hope I've made a difference."

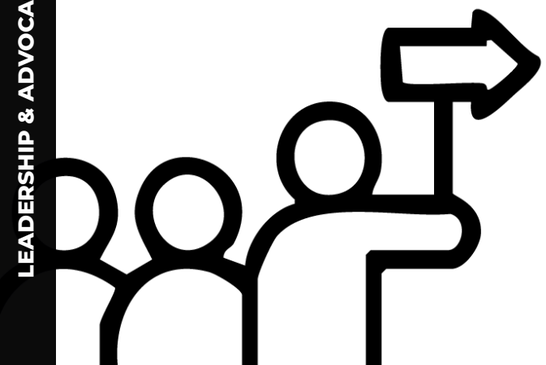
Healthwatch Dudley volunteer



Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening our sector's voice and influence

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

LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY



By creating spaces for organisations to meet, learn and work together, Dudley CVS continues to strengthen the voluntary sector's collective voice and influence. Through networks, partnerships and advocacy, we are helping to build a more resilient, connected and ambitious sector that can respond effectively to local needs and improve outcomes for communities across Dudley borough.



Strengthening a Connected and Influential Sector

As the infrastructure body for the voluntary and community sector in Dudley borough, a key part of our role is bringing organisations together, building strong networks, encouraging collaboration, and ensuring the sector's voice is heard in strategic decision-making. Throughout the year, we continued to create opportunities for organisations to connect, influence and thrive.

During 2025/26, **we organised and hosted 36 events for the voluntary sector across Dudley borough**, attended strategic meetings to represent and champion the sector's views, and **facilitated 42 network sessions across 6 themed networks**. These activities helped create stronger partnerships, increased influence and opened up new opportunities for local organisations.

This work led to:

- Securing an additional investment of **£175,000** for the voluntary sector through the New Beginnings Fund, supporting creative projects that welcome and support refugees, asylum seekers and migrants across Dudley.
- Achieving a joint commitment from partners to establish a new **Mental Health Board for Dudley borough**, strengthening collaboration and strategic leadership around mental health.
- Successfully overturning a number of Dudley Borough Compact breaches for voluntary sector organisations.
- Securing sector investment in the **Cake Not Hate programme**, supporting community cohesion
- Continuing to mobilise the voluntary sector to support Dudley MBC to ensure people facing financial hardship receive the support they need with food parcels, white goods and hardship payments. **A total of 4,826 households were supported**.
- Securing funding to launch a new voluntary sector hospital discharge pilot with a total of **£125,000** investment for frontline voluntary organisations.

Amplifying voices to influence change

We make sure people of all ages are heard, valued and included. Our collaborative approach ensures communities can actively shape the services and decisions that impact their lives.

THE HATE YOU TAKE

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.

Amid rising local tensions and a national dialogue about the harmful effects of extremist online content, particularly on young boys, Dudley CVS secured funding to foster community cohesion. The Dudley Young Health Champions at Thorns Academy identified a critical need to address the mis/disinformation they encountered daily, aiming to create resources that help peers navigate and challenge hateful narratives.

Collaborating with Dudley Council, the DYHCs explored how easily individuals can be influenced by online voices, peers and family. The group worked with a local artist and animator to storyboard their lived experiences. Given complete creative freedom, they developed a powerful spoken word poem to accompany a finished animation highlighting the impact of viewing hateful content.

The project resulted in a **"powerful, provocative and important"** animation that has been shared widely with schools and community groups. Its impact has reached as far as the Home Office, opening important conversations between young people and adults about digital safety and online hate.

This project was designed to empower young people to become active digital citizens who can critically evaluate the content they consume. The animation now serves as a long-term educational tool, providing a youth-led perspective that resonates more deeply than traditional adult-led interventions.

A key learning was that giving young people creative autonomy is essential for authenticity; their original poem became the project's most impactful element.

View the animation:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AhP5G6iUmY





Dudley's Young Health Champions performing at Dudley CVS's annual AGM and Awards 2025

Through partnership working, targeted funding and strong voluntary sector collaboration, Dudley CVS continues to help create a more welcoming, inclusive borough where migrants, refugees and asylum seekers can thrive and contribute to their communities.

> *"I have had to take a lot of medications to help me, and in the last months of joining this walk it meant that I'm now not having to take any. I'm sleeping better and feeling much better."*
>
> A Dudley migrant supported by a Migrant Connect funded project

> *"Thank you for the opportunity to participate again in Migrant Connect in Dudley. Supporting individuals, while also being supported as a sector by Dudley CVS, has been invaluable. Working with other partners and coming together on the bi-monthly meetings has proved so beneficial, enabling us to share experiences and learn from one another across the borough."* Anna, Revival Fires

Growing Voluntary Sector Support for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are among the most vulnerable members of our communities, often facing discrimination, social isolation, poor living conditions, and barriers to accessing services. Since 2022, Dudley CVS has coordinated the Voluntary Sector Migrant Network, bringing together organisations across the borough to collaborate, share learning and improve support for people seeking a new life in Dudley.

With continued support from Dudley MBC, we have strengthened the capacity of local voluntary and community organisations to deliver innovative projects that help migrants, refugees and asylum seekers feel welcomed, connected and supported.

During 2025/26, we:

- **Published the Migrant Connect Fund Evaluation Report**, highlighting the impact of projects delivered by 10 voluntary sector organisations. Together, these projects **engaged 1,186 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants** across Dudley.
- **Launched the New Beginnings Fund**, a grants programme supporting creative projects that welcome newcomers to the borough. In Round 1, five projects received funding totalling **£91,501.21** to promote inclusion, community cohesion, education and health.
- **Opened Round 2 of the New Beginnings Fund**
- **Convened four Voluntary Sector Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Network meetings**, enabling organisations to exchange information, develop partnerships and coordinate support.
- **Worked in partnership with Healthwatch Dudley** to produce a practical information guide for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who are new to the borough.

Responding to rising tensions across Dudley borough

In summer 2025, Dudley CVS was commissioned by Dudley Safe and Sound to deliver Cake Not Hate, an initiative established in response to rising tensions across Dudley borough. With dedicated funding to promote a greater sense of community cohesion, the project aimed to address the challenges posed by local and national narratives that can divide communities. Using the simple, universal act of sharing food, the initiative brought people together, broke down barriers and created opportunities for open dialogue and meaningful connections in a neutral, welcoming and inclusive environment.

We managed a community cohesion fund that **supported 14 local organisations and groups across the borough**, including the Ethnic Minority Council, Halesowen Yemeni Association and youth groups such as Strike Youth and High Oak Youth.

We facilitated a series of Cake Not Hate events, bringing people from different backgrounds together to share cake and conversation. These events created safe, welcoming spaces for people to meet, explore shared values and challenge prejudices through direct, personal interaction.

The project mapped and engaged activities in diverse locations, including Sedgley, Brierley Hill, Stourbridge and Halesowen, ensuring borough-wide reach. By supporting a wide network of local groups, from Dudley College Student Union to Brierley Hill Community Forum, we strengthened the capacity of the voluntary sector to lead on community cohesion. The initiative also helped address local anxieties and fostered new relationships between groups that had not previously worked together.

This work demonstrated that community cohesion starts with simple, human connections and highlighted the important role of the voluntary sector in bringing people together. The relationships developed through these events have helped create a more resilient network of community leaders, better equipped to work together in responding to future tensions.

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

Improving access to GP services

Commissioned by Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, Healthwatch Dudley continued its work exploring access to GP services. We followed up with the community to ask whether recent changes to primary care had made it easier to access their GP, and whether initiatives such as Pharmacy First, Modern General Practice and the Dudley GP Patient Charter had made a difference. We also asked whether local people were aware of these initiatives.

Our work showed that there are still barriers to accessing GP services, particularly for people with additional communication needs or who are digitally excluded.

Key things we heard:

- **17%** of people are unaware of the different healthcare professionals available at their GP practice.
- **74%** of people had heard of Pharmacy First, but many reported a "back and forth" between the pharmacy and their GP.
- **14%** of people had seen and read the Dudley GP Patient Charter.

We shared these findings with Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust and local stakeholders. Improvements have already been made, there is a commitment to acting on our report recommendations, and our Charter is being used to signpost and inform patients. We will continue to ensure the voices of local people remain central to our work.

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.

Strengthening the Sector: The Community Resource Database

The cost-of-living crisis and shrinking funding opportunities created a challenging environment for Dudley's voluntary and community sector. To help ease these pressures, we identified a need to move away from isolated working towards a collaborative sharing economy model.

We reached out to organisations working with children and families to map their wants and offers. We collected information on available knowledge, venues, and physical resources to build a central database. This enables Dudley CVS to connect organisations that can support one another, facilitating everything from free venue hire to skills sharing.

This work is helping to build a more resilient network by encouraging collaboration over competition. It has strengthened Dudley CVS's role as a hub for both strategic support and the smaller, practical help that keeps community groups running.

We want this work to contribute to a lasting culture of mutual aid across the borough's vibrant voluntary sector. The database will provide a sustainable resource, helping organisations make better use of existing assets and ensure that limited resources go further.

We learned that many organisations have assets they are willing to share, but previously lacked a central way to connect with those who could benefit. Creating this central point of knowledge is a key part of our infrastructure role, helping organisations work together, share resources and build capacity across the borough.

More than the Essentials: Bringing services together to tackle poverty

Healthwatch Dudley's joint project with Black Country Foodbank, More than the Essentials, highlighted how complex, systemic challenges are pushing people into hardship.

For many, foodbank use has shifted from a temporary emergency intervention to an ongoing necessity. We listened to local people who told us how complex systems and disjointed working between services made it difficult to access the support they needed.

We brought together services from the NHS, police, social care and the voluntary sector to encourage joint working to address poverty. We invited Helen Rowe, author of *Eliminating Poverty in Britain*, to speak about how poverty affects the human body and can shape people's behaviour. This provided further insight into the impact of poverty and challenged assumptions and prejudices about people facing financial hardship.

We facilitated a conference for the community and stakeholders, opening up discussions that challenged assumptions.

One attendee reflected:

> *"It can be easy to make assumptions relating to people living in poverty. This research will make me think more about the biological impacts of poverty."*

The project raised awareness among professionals and encouraged conference attendees to make commitments to addressing poverty through their work.

A cross-sector group is now actively working together to tackle digital poverty. Voluntary sector organisations, Dudley Council and Healthwatch Dudley have also produced a practical resource to help refugees and asylum seekers access essential support.

The project demonstrated the value of bringing together organisations and creating a space for open and honest discussions. We hope this work will continue to contribute to more joined-up services and improved support for local communities, helping to reduce health inequalities across Dudley.



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

Exploring with Understory: Weaving Stories, Relationships and Possibility

Many communities hold rich histories, local knowledge and relationships that can become hidden beneath dominant narratives of place and progress. Understory was developed to explore how reconnecting with these deeper layers of memory, story and relationship can strengthen the confidence of communities to take action, and to support people to imagine and shape more connected futures. Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, Understory brings together Onion Collective CIC (based in Watchet) and Parlour with place-based partners in Minehead, Dudley and Amber Valley (Derbyshire) in a four-year collaboration to learn and experiment together.

In the first year of this collaboration, Understory partners worked together to develop and test approaches that connect storytelling, network weaving and place-based learning. Through regular gatherings, online learning sessions and local experimentation, the partnership explored how stories, relationships and local knowledge can be mapped, shared and activated by local people.

A range of tools and practices are being tested and evolved, including relationship mapping, community-of-beings mapping and games that support connection to place and help communities consider how to organise in ways that build resilience. They help people in our communities to explore the social, cultural, ecological and economic connections that shape their places. Network weavers work alongside local communities in each place to uncover overlooked stories, strengthen relationships and create opportunities for collective reflection and imagination.

The project is a partnership between Onion Collective and Parlour, working with Minehead and Coast Development Trust, CoLab Dudley and Make/Shift Derby. Community members, storytellers, artists, network weavers and a variety of local organisations all contribute to the development of Understory. In Dudley, local poet Hayley Frances has joined the Understory team to help document and share the work in creative forms.

Over the course of the year, relationships were formed and deepened, and a shared learning culture was cultivated across all partner locations. Participants developed new ways of understanding the relationships, stories and histories that shape their place and communities.

A range of practical tools and approaches have been tried, evolved and invented to support communities to reflect on the past, deepen relationships in the present and imagine possible futures together. Over 200 local people of all ages across Dudley borough participated in activities made possible through Understory support.

One of the most significant learnings from the first year of Understory has been the value of working slowly enough for relationships, trust and unexpected possibilities to emerge. Rather than focusing solely on predefined outputs, Understory has invested in creating the conditions for deeper connection, imagination and collective agency.

Looking ahead, we hope this work will continue to help communities uncover and share the stories, relationships and forms of knowledge that already exist within their places. By strengthening these connections, Understory work aims to support more resilient, creative and collaborative responses to future challenges. This collaboration has reinforced the importance of designing with emergence, centring relationships, and recognising that meaningful change often begins not with action alone, but with connection.

> ***"It feels like a great adventure — noticing, documenting and deepening relationship with beings. I feel more connected to them, and am curious to see how this develops."***
>
> Relational Beings activity participant



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

CAPACITY BUILDING

> ***"I really appreciate the time you, John, and Grace have given to this. The feedback has made a real difference to the quality of the application and I feel much more confident submitting it now. Thank you again to the whole team, your support has been invaluable."*** Afiyyah Foundation

> ***"I can't thank Becky, John and Grace enough for the support we've received! Right from the very beginning, they've supported us with setting up our CIC, and they've given us personalised advice on policies, procedures, safeguarding, insurance – as well as any other questions we've had along the way! We've recently had a meeting with Becky about converting from a CIC to a CIO and, whilst I'd researched and looked for information online, it was a minefield We literally couldn't have achieved what we have within this last year without their advice and guidance – thank you!"*** The Goodwill Revolution CIC

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, effectively, and independently.

Dudley CVS's Group Development Team works with all types of not-for-profits and people interested in setting up new not-for-profits, helping them become strong, efficient and sustainable.

Over the year, our support unlocked £484,121 in grant funding for 28 groups.

- **14 directly supported with their funding applications received £300,939 over the year.**
- **Our contribution to supporting not-for-profits to set up, govern themselves efficiently, and increase their planning and fundraising skills has seen 17 of them access £183,182 this year.**

Supporting groups to build their capacity

Between April 2025 and March 2026, our Group Development Team **provided one-to-one support to 223 groups, including individuals interested in setting up a group. This included:**

- Supporting **74** organisations with volunteering good practice, recruitment and volunteer support through our Volunteer Centre.
- Supporting **39** to set up and register as a not-for-profit organisation.
- Supporting 5 already-established organisations with conversions (e.g. CIC to charity, unincorporated group to incorporated).
- Helping **12** groups and their leaders to review and / or understand their governing documents.
- Supporting **27** groups with governance, and gave training and guidance on the legal responsibilities of charity trustees, company/ CIC directors or committee members.
- Supporting **16** groups with legal compliance, which includes topics like health and safety, safeguarding, insurance, reporting to the Charity Commission.
- Supporting **169** leaders (committee members, trustees and directors) to improve in their role. 80 of whom were new to the role. Another 18 people have been supported to join organisations as committee members, directors or trustees or to found new organisations themselves.
- Supporting **63** groups with funding and finance, including topics such as financial management, income generation, fundraising and applying for funding.
- Connecting **174** groups with others for new opportunities, collaboration or resource sharing.
- Welcoming **135** new people to our team, the support we offer and Dudley CVS more widely, representing 84 groups and 5 businesses or partners.

Giving trusted and timely funding support to benefit marginalised communities and tackle inequality: Creart Collective CIC

One of the organisations we supported with funding was Creart Collective CIC, a social enterprise that promotes social and racial justice in Dudley, and winner of our Cultural Connections award at last year's Dudley CVS Community Action Awards.

Funding support is more than simply helping with applications. It includes supporting organisations with their strategic direction and initial project ideas, helping them to plan their work and, sometimes, jointly identifying appropriate funders.

In Creart Collective's case, Marlene had already identified funders for two pieces of work. The first was a small contract through Dudley Council, which saw Creart Collective awarded **£7,500** to support marginalised women to combine creativity with entrepreneurship, equipping participants with the confidence and resources to explore future small business opportunities.

The second was a larger-scale bid to Reaching Communities, which saw the Group Development Team work with Creart Collective over a number of weeks to develop a strong application which would build upon its established work.

The Holistic Community Care Project would deliver a comprehensive programme of mental health and wellbeing support for displaced and marginalised women, combining trauma-informed therapy with creative, non-verbal approaches such as movement, music and storytelling. Alongside this, group-based psychoeducation workshops will address internalised stigma around mental health, helping participants better understand their wellbeing and feel more confident accessing support. Together, these approaches aimed to reduce isolation, improve emotional resilience and support recovery.

Knowing how competitive Reaching Communities funding is, we were thrilled when Marlene from Creart Collective CIC shared the good news that they had been **awarded a grant of £229,876**.

> ***"Securing this three-year grant from The National Lottery Community Fund is a pivotal milestone for us. This investment enables us to go beyond crisis intervention and address the root causes of racial and health inequalities. It empowers underserved communities to advocate for themselves and promotes essential policy improvements within our health institutions."***
>
> Marlene, Creart Collective CIC

Read more: www.dudleycvs.org.uk/celebrating-success-for-creart-collective-cic/



Supporting local people to turn their projects into charities

Local mum Kate Ashby had a simple idea to collect and distribute children's clothing to families in need.

Over the past six years, Kids Clothes Project has blossomed. It's now a trusted referral pathway for people who work with disadvantaged families, allowing them to access additional support. It also has donation points across the Black Country where people can give clothing and other essentials for children aged 2 to 12. The project has gained widespread support for its work reaching families who need some extra help, and has also received offers of financial donations.

What the group found difficult was formalising the project so that it could accept monetary donations and expand its work. This is where our support came in. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts to register as a charity, they asked us for help. Our Group Development Team worked with Kate and the project's founding volunteers, who had agreed to become charity trustees, and also supported the project with recruiting and managing volunteers.

It's not easy to become a charity, or to sustain one. Sometimes the assumption is that being a good cause and supporting people in or at risk of poverty is enough. But because the concept of charity is defined in law, organisations have to meet this legal definition to be eligible for registration. This means charities are defined not only by the work they do, but by how they do it — how they are run and funded, how trustees behave, and how they spend their income. It's our role to demystify this, helping people understand what being a charity really means, so they can be established on a firm footing rather than treating registration as a hurdle to jump as quickly as possible.

Over several months, we helped the founders understand the advantages and obligations of being a charity, and how to uphold public trust. We made sure the way Kids Clothes Project operated was compatible with being a charity — for example, encouraging them to develop their referral criteria in line with their charitable purposes. We helped trustees prepare the legal documents needed for registration, and trained them on their legal responsibilities, giving them the confidence to govern the charity in the long-term, not just get through the registration process. When it came to submitting the application, we supported every step of the way with the Charity Commission.

Within a few weeks of submitting its application, Kids Clothes Project became a registered charity. This demonstrates that by taking a step back and encouraging groups to engage with the concept of being a charity, rather than treating registration as a hurdle to jump as quickly as possible, our support lays foundations to build organisations on firm footings.

Since registering as a charity, Kids Clothes Project has accessed grants from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Geoff Hill Charitable Trust, alongside support from local businesses and residents who believe in its work.

Our support is ongoing too. Our team has continued to help with topics such as volunteer recruitment, ensuring there's a range of volunteering opportunities that benefit the charity and nurture its volunteers. Kate told us she's grateful and excited that our support doesn't end there — we'll be on hand to help throughout Kids Clothes Project's journey, and we're looking forward to seeing it continue to strengthen the support it provides to families across Dudley borough and beyond.

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.

This year, that investment continued, with improvements made to Brierley Hill Civic's kitchenette and main bar.

During 2025–2026, Brierley Hill Civic hosted **265 events** in total, spanning public and ticketed events, charity and not-for-profit activity, private hire, NHS, council and school events. The venue welcomed over **71,000** visitors across the year.

This continued investment is reflected in visitor feedback, with Brierley Hill Civic now holding a **4.5-star rating on Google and a 4.8-star rating on Facebook**.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to enhancing both venues further, so they continue to be spaces the community can enjoy for years to come.



Spring into Action: supporting groups to become sustainable

Spring into Action was a small grants fund designed to support local community groups in delivering activities that improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and help people connect with support in their communities.

Many residents across Dudley are facing challenges such as poor mental wellbeing, loneliness, low confidence and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. At the same time, local community groups are often best placed to provide accessible, trusted support, but may lack the funding to do so. Spring into Action was created to invest in grassroots organisations already supporting local people.

We delivered the Spring into Action funding programme, promoting the opportunity to local groups, supporting applications and **awarding funding to 13 organisations**, including Challenge Academy, Bedazzle, Creative Minds Dudley, Art Yard, Crafty Springs, Winter Warmers, Unheard Voices, Wild Earth Movement, Riverside House and Brockswood. The projects provided a range of activities focused on creativity, wellbeing, social connection and practical support.

In total **the fund reached 133 people across Dudley**, enabling local groups to deliver activities that improved wellbeing, reduced isolation and created more ways for residents to connect with others and access support in their communities. It also strengthened smaller organisations by giving them resources to continue delivering valued local activity.

Spring into Action showed the value of investing directly in local organisations that already know their communities well. We want this work to lead to stronger community capacity, more accessible local support and improved wellbeing for residents. The flexibility of the small grants and the range of groups funded worked particularly well, enabling support to reach different communities in different ways. A key learning is that even relatively small amounts of funding can make a significant difference when placed in trusted grassroots organisations.

During the year, 692 of the 981 people referred to Integrated Plus accepted the service and received support.

84 of the 137 people referred to the Integrated Plus High Intensity User (HIU) Service accepted the service and received support.

Supporting individuals to strengthen their capacity

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.

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, while identifying opportunities for them to become more connected and involved in their communities and improve their wellbeing.

Destiny, 24, was referred to Integrated Plus by Dudley Talking Therapies for social support and free activities. She was struggling with the transition to independent living, poor mental wellbeing, low confidence, financial difficulties and housing issues. Destiny felt overwhelmed and struggled to reach out to the different services she'd been signposted to.

Our Link Worker, Gemma, completed an initial home visit and worked with Destiny to put a holistic support plan in place. This included referrals to Act on Energy for energy debt and Housing Support for issues with her property, applying to the BRIC fund for an air fryer, providing a foodbank voucher and signposting to a foodbank that could meet her dietary needs.

Gemma also supported Destiny to access the Household Support Fund, arranged free bus travel through Transport for West Midlands, and referred her to The Art Yard, a Spring into Action funded group, to build confidence and improve wellbeing. Gemma continued to provide regular follow-up support throughout. As a result of the support, Destiny accessed practical help with food, energy, travel and household items, and began attending creative sessions at The Art Yard. Over time, she became more positive and confident, started attending the gym, used her bike to get out more and reconnected with an old friend. She also reported feeling more able to manage day-to-day life and more hopeful about the future.

Destiny said she was initially "overwhelmed with everything" and later reflected that she was "in a completely different place".

This case shows the value of holistic, person-centred social prescribing. The aim of the work was not only to address immediate practical issues, but to improve Destiny's confidence, independence and wellbeing over time. What worked well was the joined-up approach: we recognised that Destiny's challenges were interconnected and helped ease the pressure by making referrals and coordinating support on her behalf. A key learning is that, for people who feel overwhelmed, having someone to help navigate services and connect the dots can make a significant difference to both their practical situation and mental wellbeing.

Providing support to unpaid carers

During the year, our Carers Support Development Officer supported unpaid carers across the borough, working with them to understand their needs and connect them with the right services to help them continue in their caring roles.

We focused on strengthening our presence within Russells Hall and Corbett Hospitals, including maintaining a weekly presence at the Russells Hall Health Hub, and building close working relationships with lead nurses on the AMU and Frailty wards. Our regular presence on the wards and at the hubs has helped us identify unpaid carers earlier and offer support where they need it. This approach is also helping staff to recognise unpaid carers and understand when they may need support.

We met with the hospital therapy team to promote the carer support service, distributing leaflets outlining referral routes and available support. During Dementia Awareness Week in May, we spent two days working alongside the Admiral Nurse and Delirium Team at Russells Hall Hospital, supporting people living with dementia and their carers. This collaborative approach helped us identify carers who may not otherwise have accessed support and direct them to appropriate services and guidance.

During Carers Week, we took part in several events, including the Carers Marketplace hosted by We Love Carers, and an event at Russells Hall Hospital for carers visiting or accompanying loved ones to appointments.



We supported Mavis, an unpaid carer in her mid-eighties, who looked after her husband. *Due to several complex medical issues, he is now bedbound. When we first arrived, Mavis was tearful and said she felt overwhelmed by the level of support she was providing and the number of health professionals and care workers who visit each day.*

She shared that she missed the life she used to have with her husband, and the friendships that came with it. Although Mavis has a supportive family, she doesn't drive and felt guilty asking for their help, as they have their own lives and families. When asked if she would like a referral to her GP for mental health support, she declined, saying she preferred to talk to her friends, which she found helpful.

By the end of the visit, Mavis felt better having had the opportunity to talk openly about her feelings. She was in brighter spirits, smiling and laughing, and accepted support from a local sitting service, giving her an opportunity for respite and some time to herself.

This visit highlighted the significant emotional and practical pressures that unpaid carers face. It demonstrates the importance of person-centred contact, so carers have the time and space to be heard and recognised.

Looking ahead: Community Bridge Project

Dudley CVS has been commissioned to deliver the Community Bridge Project, a new pilot social prescribing service launched on 27 April 2026.

Delivered in partnership with the NHS and Dudley Council, Community Bridge supports patients discharged from Russells Hall Hospital, helping them transition safely back into their homes by addressing the social, practical and emotional factors that can affect recovery. The service focuses on non-clinical issues that can affect a person's recovery following discharge, aiming to bridge the gap between clinical care and independent living by connecting patients with practical and emotional support within their local communities, and helping reduce avoidable hospital readmissions.

The project focuses on:

- → Supporting safe and sustainable hospital discharge
- → Providing personalised social prescribing support
- → Connecting patients with voluntary and community organisations
- → Working alongside NHS staff to improve patient outcomes
- → Reducing unnecessary hospital readmissions where possible

We look forward to sharing the impact of this new project in next year's report.

Dudley CVS

Find out more about us: www.dudleycvs.org.uk

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