

Big Sparks Event

Update and Next Steps

March 2023

The Big Sparks Event - what was it?

The Big Sparks event took place in November 2022. It had aims to uncover, showcase and share learning about projects, groups and activities that already exist in neighbourhoods in East Sussex.

The event was planned with representatives from some of the groups which Making it Happen has worked with over the last three years. 49 groups, projects and organisations from across the County contributed to the event on the day.

Contributors hosted conversation tables and workshops, provided entertainment, displays and art exhibits. They ran demonstrations and participative activities. Groups that missed out on contributor space were invited to bring communication materials to share on information tables on the day.

Activities were organised into themes relating to people, place, planet, mind, body and spirit.



Big Sparks - Objectives

When it comes to making decisions about the allocation of resources, the main focus to support those decisions will often be placed on data about needs or deprivation. This can mean that positive things which already exist, and which are already delivering solutions, are missed.

A core objective of the Big Sparks event was to encourage those with power and influence to come along to hear first hand from just a handful of these groups already making positive changes in their neighbourhoods.



Some of the groups involved in planning and delivering Big Sparks

Big Sparks

The big day!

Big Sparks - The Event

490 people booked onto the event using Eventbrite, but we estimate the total number of attendees to have been over **500**. A large queue at reception meant that we encouraged people to walk straight through.

42 people completed our feedback form on the day. Participants were asked to provide feedback about positives from the event and also about things they would do differently.

The most common feedback theme was how much people had got out of **meeting people** and **making new connections**.

People also talked about **discovering new things** and there were **ideas** for all sorts of **new collaborations**.

There were also challenges to learn from about **logistics** and how we might better **manage the space to minimise noise** during speeches and workshops.



Clockwise from top left: 1) Getting started 2) Participants 4) Fanya Sharkey, Compass Arts on stage 5) Activity table in the planet zone 6) Sonya Moorten, ESRA 7) ESRA conversation table



Clockwise from top left ending in the centre: 1) Compass "Mining for Gold" workshop; 2) Workshop activity; 3) Delta 7 performing; 4) Hampden Park Shed conversation table; 5) Libby King from BourneThisWay



Clockwise from top left ending in the centre: 1) Know Dementia; 2) DRI Workshop 3) Tacye Turn and Mebrak Ghebweldi, DRI 4) Refugee Buddy Project conversation table; 5) Frederick Smith, Just Friends

Big Sparks - Feedback Comments

Please tell us one key thing you got out of the Big Sparks event:

"So many connections made. Biggest network event we've been a part of"

"So great to hear about many other community groups, big and small. Inspiring."

"So many wonderful organisations and fascinating people"

"I enjoyed meeting people, important to attend"

"So many people doing great things but we need more people feeling supported to keep on doing. (Events like this help!)"

"Meeting like-minded people and feeling welcomed"

Big Sparks - Contributor Feedback

Feedback from Compass Arts 'Mining for Gold' workshop

Fenya Sharkey, the workshop leader, wrote: "It took me by surprise how many participants from Compass came to the event. Usually they would be too intimidated by the crowds and noise. Many didn't stay long because of this but it was interesting to see how much they identified with the preparations for the event and were interested to observe people's reactions to the film and screen that they had contributed to. If there is going to be another event/symposium, it would be great to explore how we enable them to be more visible next time."

"It also took me by surprise that the Hampden Park participants took it upon themselves to collectively write the feedback for the screen. I ran a group session and collected some quotes but they independently gave me an envelope with feedback that went much deeper than I had anticipated. Again there was something about the intention of Big Sparks that gave our artist participants a voice."

Big Sparks - Contributor Feedback

Feedback from Compass Arts 'Mining for Gold' artist participants

"The art touches us deeply, it is a language – a way of communicating and a contribution to peoples' lives without intruding."

"We are companions that walk the same road as each other and understand where we are at."

"The creativity is stimulating and gives a sense of purpose, achievement and discovery."

"Stepping aside from the routine and drudgery and having something to do that inspires me and brings joy."



Big Sparks - what needs to happen next?

Groups that contributed to the Big Sparks event were invited to a follow up meeting to explore next steps in January 2023.

Representatives from the Making it Happen Team were joined by 11 representatives from local community organisations and 2 representatives from East Sussex County Council.

The session was facilitated by Collaborate CIC.

Participants discussed the Big Sparks event, but they also discussed some of the deeper intentions behind the event and considered next steps.



Greenhavens Network conversation table



Just Friends conversation table



Lesley Boniface, Greenhavens Network

Big Sparks - Next Steps

The session provided an opportunity to explore some of the deeper intentions behind the event, particularly in relation to the principles and values of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD).

ABCD refers to development that is led by the community which takes as a starting point the positives, strengths, assets and opportunities that already exist. The approach is underpinned by a set of principles and values which inform work on the ground:



Big Sparks Next Steps – the Big Questions

Participants at the Next Steps meeting split into two groups to discuss the following questions:

What support do you need to further your ABCD practice? How might you support others to further their practice?

What needs to change more widely to increase ABCD in East Sussex?

The following pages provide a summary of the ideas that were put forward.



Red Tape

Participants highlighted a number of issues which can make it hard or demoralising for groups on the ground. Sometimes it can put people off wanting to do things in their community at all.

Challenge

Holding funds for small informal groups who don't have or don't want the responsibility of a bank account

Community Spacers requiring Public Liability insurance for room bookings for any kind of activity

DBS checks for informal volunteers and activity which take time and can put people off

Idea

The Voluntary Action organisations are getting together to discuss the issues and explore solutions or perhaps guidance

What else could be done?

ABCD Support on the Ground

There was feedback about the importance of on the ground support for people or groups who are working to make positive change. The specific feedback was about ensuring that there is support to make connections to other assets or resources, and also for advice or support when times are tough.

Challenge

Support for
Community led action

Idea

ABCD Worker time

Local Sparks events
with community
budgets

ABCD model
constitution or
guidance for groups
who want to adopt this
way of working

ABCD Learning

There were lots of ideas to encourage wider learning about this approach for people from communities, but also from larger organisations and statutory bodies. The emphasis was on creating opportunities for people to learn together and to learn from each other.

Challenge

Embedding ABCD learning in communities and in larger VCSOs and statutory organisations

Idea

Local Community of Practice events planned and delivered with local groups

ABCD Workshops

Peer learning / support for groups interested in adopting more ABCD ways of working

ABCD Resources Toolkit

Voice and influence

Challenges were raised about the gap (or a perceived gap) between the skills, knowledge and activity taking place on the ground, and decisions being made around resource allocation, service design, and strategy and policy development.

Challenge

Raising awareness of the work of communities and the value of this to local people.

Idea

Building relationship and connections with the VCSE Alliance

Deepening connections with local community networks and the Alliance

Inviting commissioners and decision makers to visit local groups and attend local events

Encourage wider opportunities for people to engage in local planning and decision making

Community representation on the Grow Grant panel

what would you do?

Are there ideas here that you would be interested in working with us to take forward?

Do you have other ideas you would like to progress to address any of the themes identified?

What else needs to be done?

Please do get in touch: makingithappen@sussexcommunity.org.uk

Big Sparks Thank You

We owe a big thank you to all of the following:

Individuals who participated in planning the Big Sparks event:

Lizzie Lower – Hospitable Environment
Ellie Johnson-Bullock – Hospitable Environment
Fenya Sharkey – Compass Community Arts
Sherry Clark – The Green Room and Transition Town Hastings
Kanna Ingleson – Community volunteer
Frederick Smith – Just Friends
Andy Kybett – Wyntercon
Libby King – BourneThisWay
Gemma – Sharing Skills CIC
Annie – Crafty Annie
Terry Hume – ESCC

Individuals who attended the Next Steps discussion

Dan Ori – Gardening In
Sherry Clark – Transition Town Hastings
Libby King – BourneThisWay
Lesley-Anne Boniface – Greenhavens
Julia Roberts – Culture Shift
Luke Reed-George – Culture Shift
Fenya Sharkey – Compass Community Arts
Lizzie Lower – Hospitable Environment
Jim Beaumont – Tech Resort
Emma Dean – ESCC
Claire Bryant – Rother VSCE Network
Terry Hume – ESCC
Chris Richards – Hastings Men's Network
Julie Barnett – Greenhavens

Big Sparks Thank You

Big Sparks Contributors

- Compass Community Arts
- BourneThisWay
- The Newhaven Green Centre
- Sharing Skills CIC
- East Sussex Recovery Alliance
- Delta 7
- Culture Shift
- Just Friends
- Diversity Resource International (DRI)
- Black Butterfly
- Greenhavens Network
- Inroads Productions
- Hastings Men's Network
- The Tide Mills Choir
- The Havens Peer Support Network
- Know Dementia
- Peacehaven Mosque and Community Centre
- Friends, Families and Travellers
- The Hastings Botanic Garden
- The Hastings Green Room
- Transition Town Hastings
- KP Projects
- Gardening In
- Crowborough Community Orchard
- Nature Links Community Action Project
- The Railway Land Wildlife Trust
- Bexhill Men's Shed
- The Hospitable Environment Project
- Tech Resort
- WynterCon CIO
- Newtopias
- Crafty Annie
- AOI Bara
- The Refugee Buddy Project
- Willingdon Trees Community Centre
- Bexhill Make and Mend
- Hastings Library of Things
- Hampden Park Shed
- Therapy on the Mic
- W.AVE Arts
- The ABC Fund
- Rother VCSE Network
- Collaborate CIC
- ESCC Research and Intelligence Team
- ESCC External Funding Team
- ESCC Social Value Market Place

The Making it Happen Partners:

- 3VA
- Action in Rural Sussex
- Hastings Voluntary Action
- Rother Voluntary Action
- Sussex Community Development Association

For more information:

Visit: www.making-it-happen.org.uk

Email: makingithappen@sussexcommunity.org.uk

Big Sparks was organised by the Making it Happen Team, and planned and delivered by individuals, groups and organisations from across East Sussex.

Making it Happen is funded by East Sussex County Council and is being delivered in partnership by Sussex Community Development Association with 3VA, Action in Rural Sussex, Hastings Voluntary Action and Rother Voluntary Action.



