



MAKING IT HAPPEN

AREA SNAPSHOT

Polegate

Action in Rural Sussex

Nov 2019 – December 2024



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What This Snapshot Will Cover

- **The aim of this Snapshot**
- **Introduction**
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 - What is Making it Happen?
 - Links to wider health policy, strategy and guidance
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The Aim

The aim of this snapshot is to provide background information drawn from learning over the course of the Making it Happen programme to support deeper conversations about neighbourhoods in East Sussex where statistical data might suggest a challenging picture, while lived experience offers an alternative perspective. The snapshots add valuable qualitative insight to complement data about neighbourhoods in East Sussex.

Statistical data utilised in decision making about which areas to focus on at the start of the programme is revisited and reviewed in the context of development and learning gleaned from the programme over time.

The snapshots do not seek to provide a comprehensive profile of an area but draw on learning from and about the assets that are present, and developments which have occurred over time and reported on within the Making it Happen programme by local residents and by the Community Development Workers who work alongside them.

The aim of this snapshot is to start a conversation and to complement statistical data prepared through the Integrated Community Teams here: <https://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/resources/ict-profiles/>

This is to inform thinking about approaches and methods of engaging communities in addressing health inequalities.



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Introduction

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What is Asset-Based Community Development?

“Building on the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, **asset based community development** (ABCD) draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future” (*Asset Based Community Development Institute, DePaul University*: <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx>)

“ABCD challenges the traditional deficit-based approach that tries to solve urban and rural development problems by focusing on the needs and deficiencies of individuals, neighbourhoods, towns, villages, etc. ABCD demonstrates that local assets (people, physical assets etc.) and individual strengths are key to ensure **sustainable community development**, and that people have a life of their own choosing.” (*Nurture Development, 2018*)

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What is Making it Happen?

Making it Happen has adopted the principles and values of ABCD. Generic Community Development Workers (CDWs) work alongside communities in a neighbourhood context to identify, connect and build from the positive things that exist in a locality.

Because there is no set agenda other than positive action taken forward by the community, it has the potential to enrich every aspect of civil society and to feed into the whole range of local strategic priorities.

This enrichment is in part dependent on the willingness and ability of local institutions and organisations to flex and adapt in response to the broader and deeper engagement this can bring.

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Relevant Health Policy, Strategy and Guidance

Making it Happen contributes to the delivery of numerous policy and strategy objectives and can assist in the fulfilment of a range of guidance around working with communities:

- [Mental Health](#) (World Health Organisation)
- [Community engagement: improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities](#) (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2016)
- [Fair Society Healthy Lives](#) – The Marmot Review (Marmot et al, 2010)
- [A guide to community centred approaches for health and wellbeing](#) (Public Health England and NHS England 2015)
- [Reducing health inequalities: system, scale and sustainability](#) (Public Health England, 2017)
- [Community Centred Public Health: Taking a whole system approach](#) (Public Health England 2020)
- [Working in Partnership with People and Communities](#) (NHS England, July 2022)
- [Improving Lives Together](#) (Sussex Health and Care, December, 2022)
- [Working with people and communities strategy](#) (Sussex Health and Care, 2022)

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Polegate

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Area context

Polegate lies in the middle of a chain of settlements stretching from the south coast up into Wealden. While a town in its own right, it also forms part of Eastbourne's built-up area, connected by an urban corridor through Willingdon. Other towns and villages close by include Pevensey and Westham to the east, and Hailsham approximately 4 miles north.

In local politics, the area is split across four wards: Polegate Central, North, and South, as well as Willingdon Watermill. Nationally, the town is primarily located within the Lewes constituency, while bordering three other constituencies; this will be simplified at the next election, when boundary changes mean the entire area will lie firmly within Lewes.

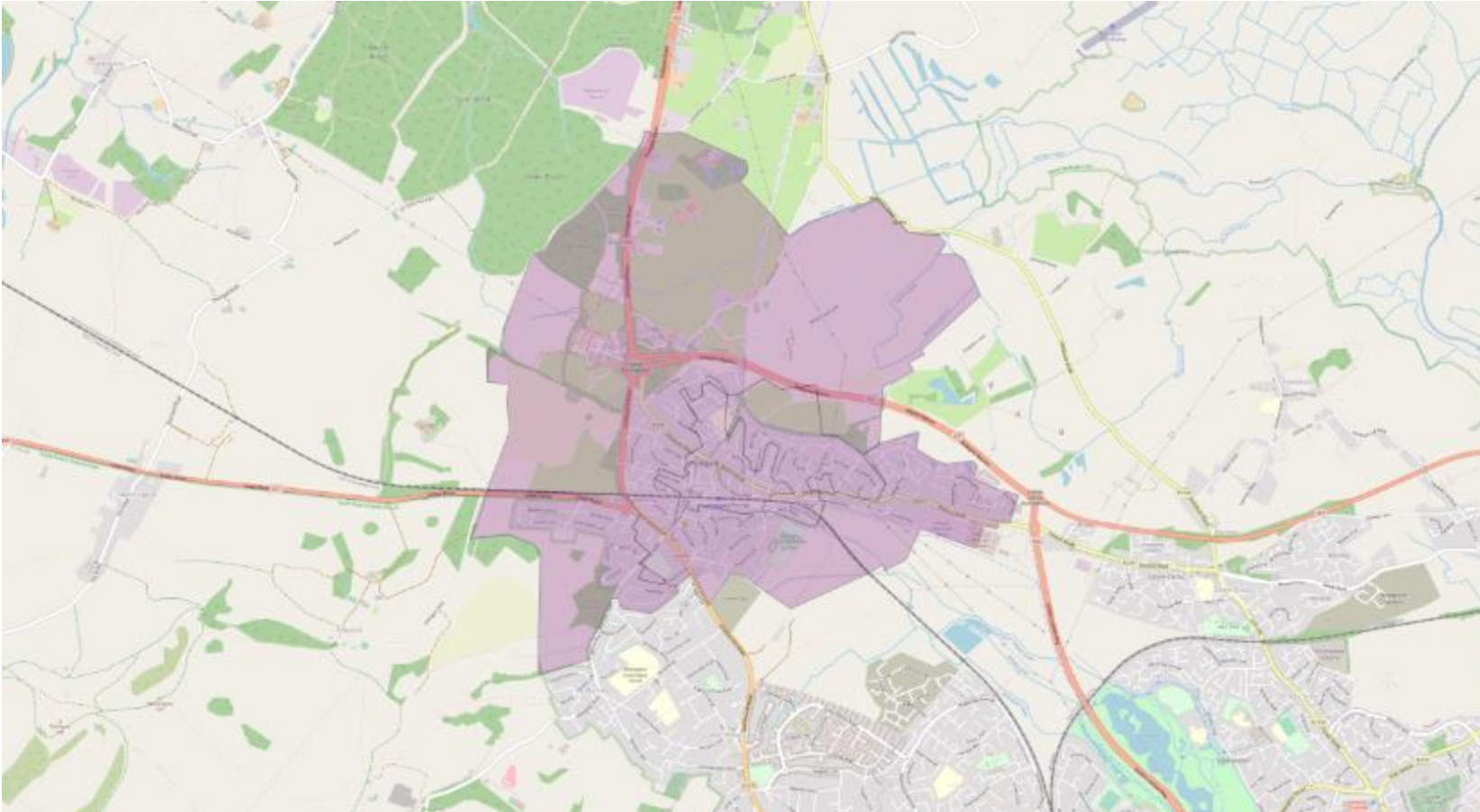
While connected to Eastbourne geographically, Polegate maintains its own social and cultural town core, mostly centred around the High Street and Roy Martin Way, with amenities including a pharmacy, opticians, GP surgery, food stores, and cafes and restaurants all in close proximity to one another. The High Street is also the location of Polegate station, which connects the town to Brighton, Eastbourne, Hastings and London Victoria via direct services. Similar connections are provided by several regular bus routes, while the town also connects to the Cuckoo Trail cycle route, with the main 11 mile trail running to Heathfield, and a 3 mile southern extension linking to Shinewater.

On the outskirts of the town lies Polegate Primary School; for secondary and other education, residents are reliant on schools in neighbouring areas, such as Willingdon Community School. The town includes two green spaces and recreation grounds at the War Memorial and Brightling Road, with the latter also including the Jubilee Nature Reserve.

The town lies in close to major road links such as the A22 and the A27, with these two roads forming a ring around the northern and western sides of the town; as a result, there is a feeling of being surrounded by traffic and cut off from surrounding towns and villages. In spite of this, the town's population has grown significantly over the last 20 years, from 6963 in 2001, to 9339 in 2021, a 34% increase, outstripping the 7.5% increase seen in Wealden overall.

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The Area



While a town in its own right, **Polegate** also forms part of Eastbourne's built-up area, connected by an urban corridor through Willingdon

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Executive Summary

Polegate

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Executive Summary

- The data in 2019 was less negative than some other MIH areas, but there were challenges around a higher than average number of older people living alone, self reported bad health, dementia and disability, alongside geographical barriers and challenges in relation to housing, space and environment, and relationships and trust.
- There were strong positives such as a community centre, community association, library and local clubs and associations, alongside presence of green and open spaces.
- CDW capacity was stretched in this area and focus was given to work on the Polegate Jubilee Nature Reserve (PJNR). The Town Council were keen to encourage community engagement in the management of the land.
- An initial World Café event drew lots of interest, but many of those present were not local.
- The Town Council was keen for MIH to support the development of a Friends group to manage the land. This initially had the effect of dampening interest – perhaps a sense of a solution being imposed. Over time, a Friends group has emerged and a strong and dedicated group is forming.
- The space is becoming an area for conservation, improved habitat for wildlife and there is also a calm and inviting space for people to enjoy.
- The PJNR is beginning to be used by wider groups and is becoming an asset for wider community focus. There are open days and there is now greater access for volunteers.
- Clearing and developing the space for public access proved challenging and hard work for volunteers.
- There remains some tension with the Town Council who still have a stake and expectations as the owners of the land.
- There is a ongoing demand on the volunteers and risk of burnout, and need for regular new volunteers and wider engagement.
- Useful learning about the importance of allowing time for genuine community leadership to evolve, and the tension when the context is a statutory objective.

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The Picture in 2019

Summary of the 2019 area rationale:

Polegate

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2019 Area Rationales

In 2019 ahead of the launch of the Making it Happen programme, delivery partners reviewed existing data about East Sussex to inform decisions about which areas to focus activity.

Areas were selected based on relative deprivation and health inequality evidenced by 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and 2018 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). 2016-17 WARM ward and 2018 Co-op wellbeing index data were also considered. These illustrated indicators such as confidence, quality of local services, employment, experience of isolation, crime and unemployment. Broadly, the areas selected showed relative dissatisfaction with key themes in relation to living in the area and general quality of life.

Crucially, the area rationales also drew on CDW learning from previous Public Health programmes including Chances for Change, which provided a much more nuanced picture than the statistical data alone might suggest. CDWs sought to highlight the presence of local assets and opportunities to build from. They were able to highlight key connectors, appetite and ideas as well as potential challenges and blocks to community engagement.

A summary of the area rationale produced at that time is shared in the following slides.

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Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2018

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) identifies the current and future health and wellbeing needs and strengths of local communities. These resources help to inform decisions and plans to improve local people's health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities in East Sussex.

Polegate – worse than East Sussex average in rates of:

- Ratio of working age to non-working age people
- Older People Living Alone
- Income Deprivation Affecting Children (**North only**)
- Fuel Poverty
- Early Years Development (**North only**)
- Key Stage 2 Development (**South only**)
- GCSE Attainment (**North only**)
- Adults with No/Low Qualifications
- Pupils with Special Educational Needs (**South only**)
- Socially Rented Households (**South only**)
- People self-reporting bad or very bad health
- People self-reporting a long-term health condition or disability
- Adults with Depression
- Adults with Dementia (**South only**)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services caseloads (**North only**)
- GP-reported Hypertension

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Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD): The English indices of deprivation measure relative deprivation in small areas in England called lower-layer super output areas. The Indices provide a set of relative measures of deprivation for small areas across England, based on seven different domains, or facets, of deprivation. IMD's score areas between 0-5 based on levels of deprivation, with 5 representing the least deprived and 1 the most deprived. A score of 0 is registered where no data is available.

IMD scores for Polegate:

Income – 4

Employment - 4

Education, skills and training - 4

Barriers to housing and services – 3

Geographical barriers - 2



Income deprivation



Employment deprivation



Health deprivation and disability



Education, skills and training deprivation



Barriers to housing and services



Crime domain



Living environment deprivation

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Co-Op Wellbeing Index: 2018 WARM Ward Data: 2016-17

Co-op Wellbeing Index

<https://communitywellbeing.coop.co.uk/>

The index provides an insight into what is important to people in a local community. The following themes were highlighted as priorities for Polegate:

- Health
- Economy work and employment
- Housing, space and environment
- Relationships and trust

WARM Ward data

WARM provided a way of understanding and identifying an area's strengths, such as levels of social capital, confidence amongst residents, the quality of local services or proximity to employment; as well as vulnerabilities such as isolation, high crime, low savings and unemployment.

Amber

- Life satisfaction
- Education
- Health
- Material wellbeing
- Strong & stable families
- Belonging
- Public services
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- Infrastructure

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Discovery Activity 2019

In each of the areas, Community Development Workers undertook discovery activity to establish whether the conditions for Asset Based Community Development were present. This involved drawing on existing local knowledge and relationships (their own and that of their organisation), and mapping of other local assets to connect with and build from.

Polegate

- The team identified the following assets with potential to build from:
 - Polegate Community Centre – well used for a wide range of activities and services
 - Polegate Community Association
 - Local clubs and societies
 - Polegate pre-school and playgroup
 - Nursery
 - Healthy living Club
 - Royal British Legion Club
 - Polegate Gardeners
 - Stud Farm
 - Allotment and garden society
 - Library

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The Picture in 2024

Polegate

Reflections on developments and change over time

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2023 Reflections

In June and December 2023 Community Development Workers from the five Making it Happen Teams that work in each of the Districts and Boroughs came together at two away days to reflect on developments, challenges and learning over time in each of the neighbourhoods where they have been working.

Polegate Jubilee Nature Reserve (PJNR)

- PJNR has been the main focus of MiH support in Polegate. This was a multifaceted collaboration to support the creation of a new community asset initially involving the Town Council, Making it Happen, and Sacred Earth. Work supported by MiH has led to the development of a Friends of group to help manage the land and make sure it is community led.
- They are now a constituted group and have done great work clearing the land and sensitively manage it for biodiversity. They are now beginning to work with local groups to encourage wider community engagement and to run events. CDW supported the group to expand their connections to other local groups and assets.
- One of these is the Polegate Community Foundation (which used to be Polegate Scarecrows), which has a young volunteer guiding it and whose brother has already helped PJNR with a logo. The PJNR did get new volunteers but uptake was slow to get started, so the links were valuable.
- PJNR also collaborate with local businesses, (eg local co-op) and other organisations to add value and help develop activity.

Initial consultations were well attended and showed that local people had lots of ideas and enthusiasm. This was difficult to harness given the time required to support the development of a Friends group, and this meant that some of the early contacts and initial energy was lost.

This was an unusual project for MiH as it began life as a top down handing on of a new asset by the Town Council, which evolved into a more ABCD approach. This did create some tensions in relation to the development of it, which at times did not feel grass roots and organic.

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ABCD Learning Reflections

What have you learned?

- That if something starts in a more complex way and has a variety of stakeholders with different agendas, creating a true ABCD model can be hard.
- The needs of the system need to find a balance with the asset-based approach and be prepared to be sensitive about imposing their needs on volunteers. This has largely been successful in Polegate, but there are some areas which may need sensitive handling in the future.

What do you want to share with others?

- This has been a different way of working with MiH in that it mainly has focused on one project but in more depth. However, this model has offered opportunities, especially now, for CDW to partner with the community to widen focus out, so that a partnership is being built.

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Grant Funding

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(Between April 2020 and December 2024)

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The Grant Programme

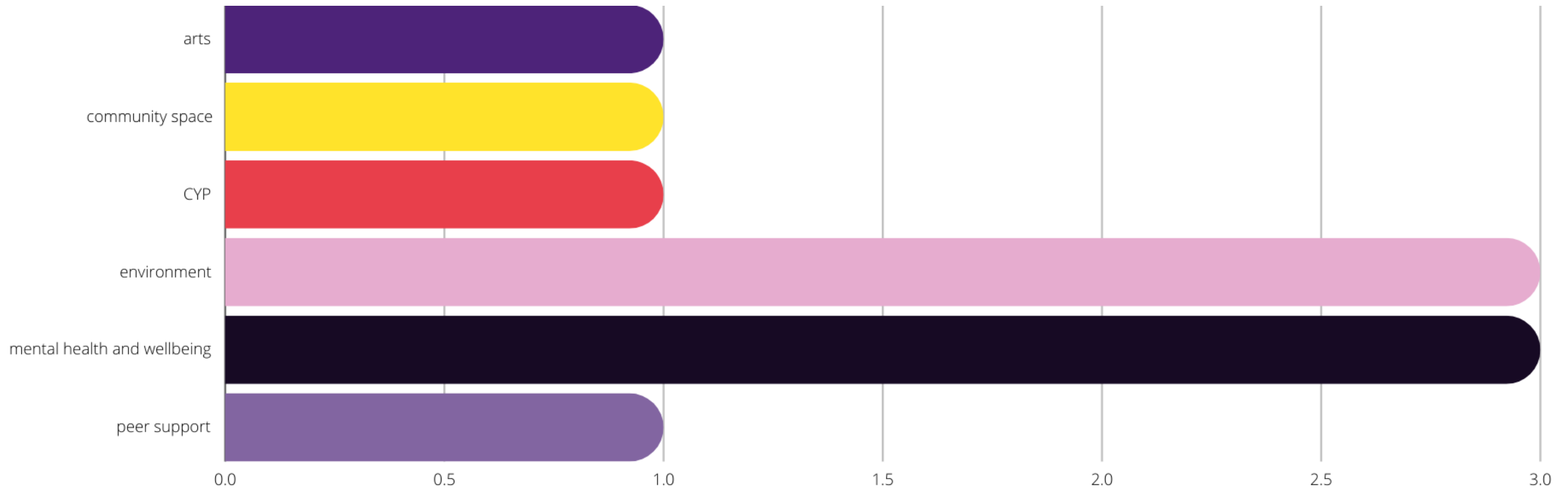
The making it Happen grant programme was designed to be flexible and offer a range of funding options to reflect the needs of different projects of different sizes. The broad aim was for projects or activity that would build from the positive things that are already present, involve local people, benefit the wider community, and encourage community led development. There were three levels of funding:

- Small Sparks – grants up to £500 for individuals or groups
- Next Steps – grants of between £501 and £3000
- Grow Grants – grants of between £3,001 and £15,000

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Grants Awarded in Polegate

Number of grant-funded projects/activities by primary theme between April 2020 and December 2024:

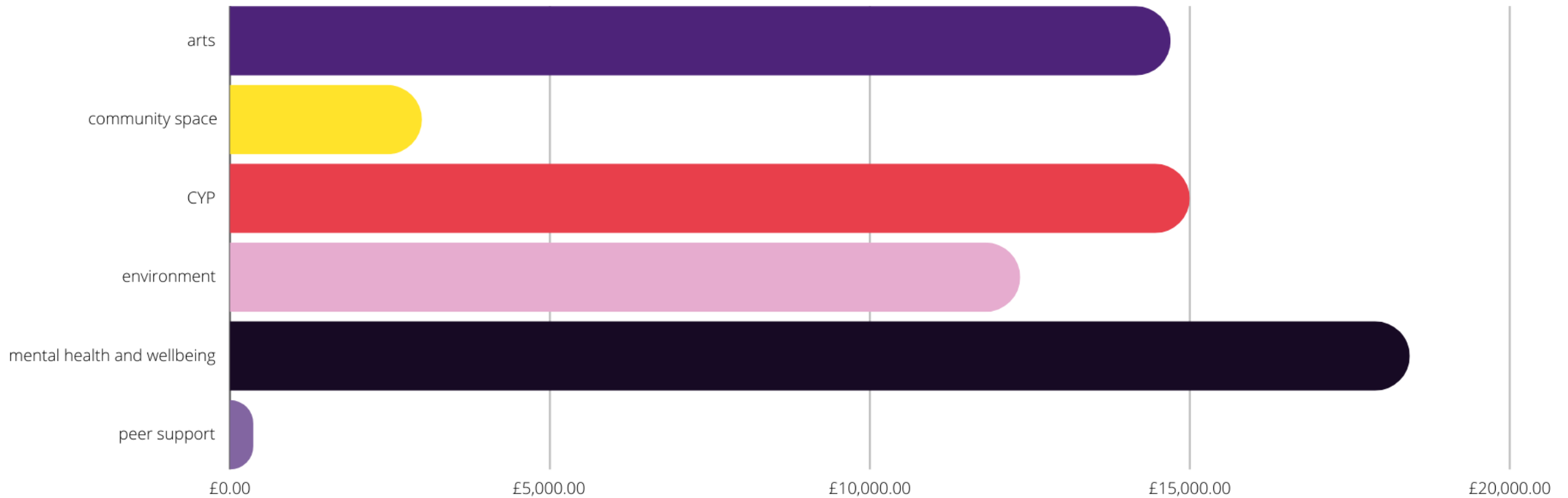


NB: It should be noted that many projects relate to more than one theme. This graph draws on the central project intention and also includes county wide projects and activities

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Grants Awarded

Total sum invested in Polegate by primary theme:



NB: This graph draws on projects local to the area in addition to county wide initiatives which may benefit local residents.

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Impact and Outcomes





Polegate Neighbourhood Sparks event and the Polegate Jubilee Nature Reserve

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Broader Context

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Addressing Health Inequalities

Making it Happen adds value to initiatives, such as the [NHS Core 20 plus 5](#) programme, in effort to reduce health inequalities whilst also encouraging individuals and communities to take positive action for themselves.

The focus is on the role that community building plays in addressing the **wider determinants of health** by “drawing on existing human and material resources to enhance self help and social support, and to develop flexible systems for strengthening public participation and direction of health matters” (WHO Ottawa Global Conference)

In this way, Making it Happen is working with communities to develop solutions that intersect the wider determinants of health to encourage **social connection, build resilience and improve mental and physical health and wellbeing**. These outcomes are being reported across the whole range of projects which communities are driving, regardless of their original intention.

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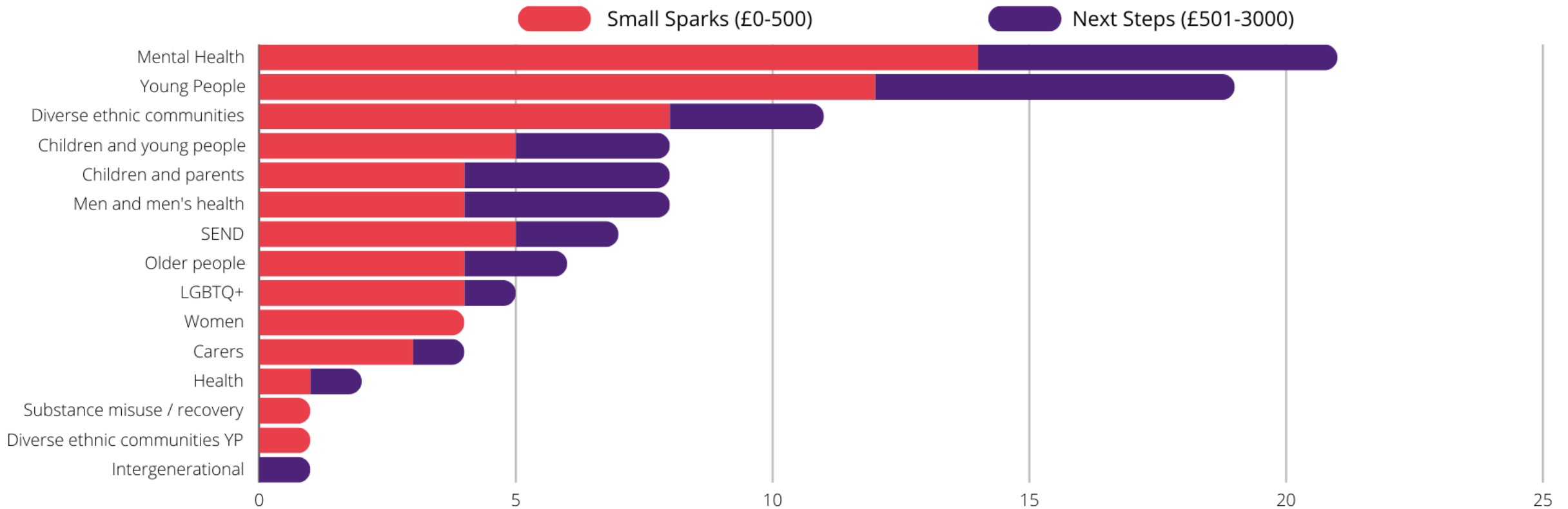
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Through the Making it Happen programme we have sought to ensure that we are maximising opportunities to engage with those least likely to be heard. Our goal is to add additional value to more targeted health and wellbeing programmes, services and interventions by encouraging relationships, connections and trust within communities and by supporting a ripple effect of positive action, engagement and collaboration. A central objective is to build on and support positives and opportunities that already exist, and to avoid duplication. This includes working alongside individuals, groups and organisations who represent or work with those individuals and communities who are marginalised or have least access to power.

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Grants Awarded

Allocation of smaller grants by protected characteristic across the MIH programme:

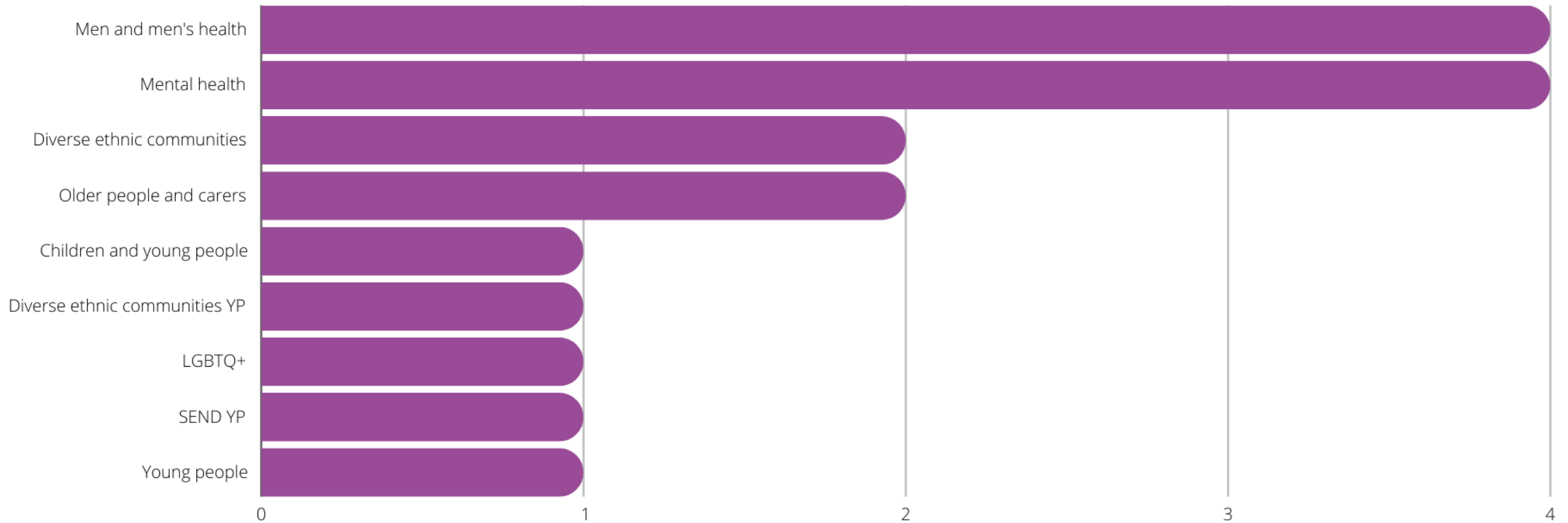


- It is important to note that many projects will have more than one core beneficiary group. Those detailed here are those that are focused on a particular group.

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Grants Awarded

Allocation of larger grants by protected characteristic across the MIH programme:



- It is important to note that many projects will have more than one core beneficiary group. Those detailed here are those that are focused on a particular group.

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Polegate: Protected Characteristics

Making it Happen does not collect personal information or data. However, some groups are set up for a specific purpose, or for a specific community of identity. Broadly, in Polegate, the MIH Development workers work with people who have identified as having the characteristics detailed opposite.

It is important to note that each of the MIH priority areas is in an area of relatively low income. Therefore, socio economic inequality is likely to be a theme running across the majority of projects supported through the programme.

- **Mental Health**
- **Families / parents**
- **Children and young people**

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Stage Two Evaluation

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Evaluation Reflections

making-it-happen.org.uk/stage-two-report

MAKING IT HAPPEN **REPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS**

Building A Better ABCD Movement

1 IDENTIFY

Identify learning about successful approaches and processes from the programme and make them accessible, to allow them to be replicated across the wider system.

2 EMBED

Embed Making it Happen more effectively into the fabric of the wider VCFSE sector.

3 DEVELOP

Develop a direct strategy for enabling the wider system and sharing learning.

4 BUILD

Build a movement, not just a collection of projects.

Evaluation by our Partners
Collaborate CIC produced
reflections on the programme
overall through the Stage Two
Report:

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Evaluation Reflections

MAKING IT HAPPEN
STAGE TWO EVALUATION

[making-it-happen.org.uk/
stage-two-report](https://making-it-happen.org.uk/stage-two-report)

How community projects have impacted communities

INDIVIDUALS HAVE

Reported an increase in
self-confidence and **self-esteem**

Reported improvements in
physical and mental wellbeing

Developed new **skills** and **capabilities**

PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER HAVE

Felt **deeper connections with others**

Become more likely to **reach out** to others
to **learn, work,** and **take action** collectively

A key aspect of this was reflections on the impact projects can, and have had on communities:

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Evaluation Reflections

making-it-happen.org.uk/stage-two-report

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The Asset-Based Approach to
Community Development:

Why it Works

BUILD ON LIVED EXPERIENCE

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE

TURN DEFICITS INTO STRENGTHS

ACCESSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE GRANTS

LEARN FROM SETBACKS

The evaluation also reflects on why the ABCD approach is working:

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Insights

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Insights: Changes Over Time

Compared with other Making it Happen areas, in 2019 the statistical data was less negative than in some other patches, but there were a higher than average number of older people living alone, and issues in relation to bad health, disability, dementia and disability. Geographical barriers were also cited and challenges in relation to housing, space and environment and relationships and trust.

CDWs reported a number of local assets including a community centre and community association, local clubs, societies, a library and also a number of green and outdoor initiatives – Polegate Gardeners, an allotment and garden society and a stud farm.

Capacity to work in Polegate was limited, so the main focus of attention has been on the Polegate Jubilee Nature Reserve.

There is some correlation between the original data and the focus of activity in the area in that this project, driven by the Town Council, has sought to make best use of one of the green space opportunities to encourage broader engagement, relationships and trust through development of an area of land for wildlife and biodiversity.

The Council's aim was to encourage community management of the land.

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Insights: Changes Over Time

The nature of the initiative – in that it was driven by a desire by Polegate Town Council to pass responsibility for management of the land to the community – made this an unusual project for MIH, but there has been sufficient community interest that, over time, the approach has become more asset based and more driven by the community.

The starting point for PJNR was a world café event which drew lots of interest and proved to be a vibrant event, although the CDWs noted that many of those present were not actually from Polegate. The primary focus on supporting the development of a Friends Group as per the Town Council's request, initially had the effect of turning people off engagement, and getting and retaining new volunteers has been an ongoing struggle.

However, over time a Friends Of group has emerged which has developed this space into a valuable local community asset. There is a core group of committee members and volunteers who work to create a space for conservation and improved habitat for wildlife alongside a calm and inviting space for people to enjoy.

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Insights: Changes Over Time

However, part of the value of the CDW role was in navigating through this challenge and over time, the engagement of new volunteers has built. The land is also beginning to be used by wider groups and this is beginning to give it a community focus. The hope is that over time this will increase the sense of belonging and satisfaction for those who participate in some way.

Challenges do still exist. PJNR has taken longer than anticipated to establish itself and grow, which has meant that some volunteers have shouldered more work than expected. The land needed a lot of work to make it accessible and while the group has been supported by the Town Council, it had to do a lot of work themselves.

There are some concerns around managing Town Council expectations, due to the fact that Polegate Town Council own the land and want to specify opening times for community access. Finding the balance between working for the land and nature and encouraging community access remains a challenge.

There is perhaps useful learning here around the importance of allowing time for interest, relationships, trust and engagement to build to enable genuine community leadership, but that this is not always feasible within the context of statutory obligations and timescales.

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Insights: Changes Over Time

CDWs have reflected on the implications and also the potential for new growth.

- The fact that the Town Council own the land, but the community are running it, has impacted on the development and undermined the ABCD process a little.
- On the plus side, the group do get some financial and work based support in managing the land which has helped them move forward quicker.
- There is a risk of volunteer burn out, but this is easing as more new volunteers join.
- The group are protective of the land, and wanted to get to a certain place before encouraging community access. This did cause some friction in the early stages, but this is less of an issue as work is completed. They are holding regular open days, broadening access times for volunteers and offering community groups the opportunity to use the space.

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Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

- **Strengths**

- Presence of local assets such as a community centre and library
- The committee driving the Polegate Jubilee Nature Reserve
- Partnership between PJNR Committee and the local Town Council

- **Challenges**

- The fact that the council own the land while the community run it been a source of tension
- Need for plenty of volunteers to prevent burn out
- Need for ongoing community engagement to broaden opportunities for engagement beyond this one project

- **Opportunities**

- Regular open days being held on the land and increasing connection with other local community groups
- The presence of the community centre, community association and library as assets to engage with to encourage broader and deeper engagement

- **Threats**

- Capacity to continue working in the area
- New programmes and initiatives that don't build from learning from Making it Happen, which risk relationships and undermine opportunities for collaboration and co-creation with communities
- Funding landscape