MAKING IT HAPPEN
AREA SNAPSHOT

Eastern Rother

Rother Voluntary Action

Nov 2019 – December 2024

Rother Voluntary Action

AREA SNAPSHOT

What This Snapshot Will Cover

- **The aim of this Snapshot**

- **Introduction**
  - What is ABCD?
  - What is Making it Happen?
  - Links to wider health policy, strategy and guidance

- **Executive Summary**

- **2019 Insights**
  - The area rationale approach
  - Area background and context
  - 2019 data
  - Community Development Worker discovery reports

- **2024 Insights**
  - Community Development Worker reflections on key developments, challenges and learning
  - Grants awarded by theme
  - Equalities connections
  - Learning from the Making it Happen evaluation

- **Key insights**

- **Strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats**

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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 snap shot 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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"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.

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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Eastern Rother

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Area context

As well as being the easternmost part of Rother, the **Eastern Rother** area hugs the overall eastern border of East Sussex. To the west, it reaches as far as Peasmarsh to the north-west, and just beyond Icklesham to the south-west, while wrapping around Rye closer to the centre of the area, so that these two extremities form arms of sorts, with a large expanse that falls within other areas in between.

The area is particularly rural and sparsely populated, even within the wider context of Rother overall, with the easternmost section of the area having the lowest population density across all of East Sussex, and Eastern Rother as an area overall having approximately half the total population of Rye, despite covering more than ten times more ground. As a result of this character, identifying access to facilities and amenities is very different to other areas across Rother and East Sussex. For example, while primary-aged schools are present directly in places such as Icklesham, other towns and villages such as Iden and Camber do not have the same access; overall, all such areas are reliant on Rye for secondary education.

Access is similarly uneven in terms of healthcare – while some parts of the area have relatively immediate GP access, Peasmarsh is 2.5miles from the closest GP surgery, the Rye Medical Centre; conversely, while Camber has better access to general healthcare, it is as far as 11 miles away from the nearest Accident & Emergency department for the area, located at the Conquest Hospital in Hastings.

These access issues are compounded and complicated by the relationship of the area to tourism. Camber faces up to 25000 visitors to Camber Sands during summer months – as well as dominating the direction of the local economy, this also impacts access to transport. Residents with access to cars can face blocked driveways, while buses – the sole public transport link available – can be stuck in traffic jams for up to 3 hours, or even suspended dependent on the severity of the weather.

As with other amenities, other parts of the area have even less access to public transport than this, with buses to and from Peasmarsh and Iden to Rye running only every two hours at most, with the last bus at around 9:30pm.

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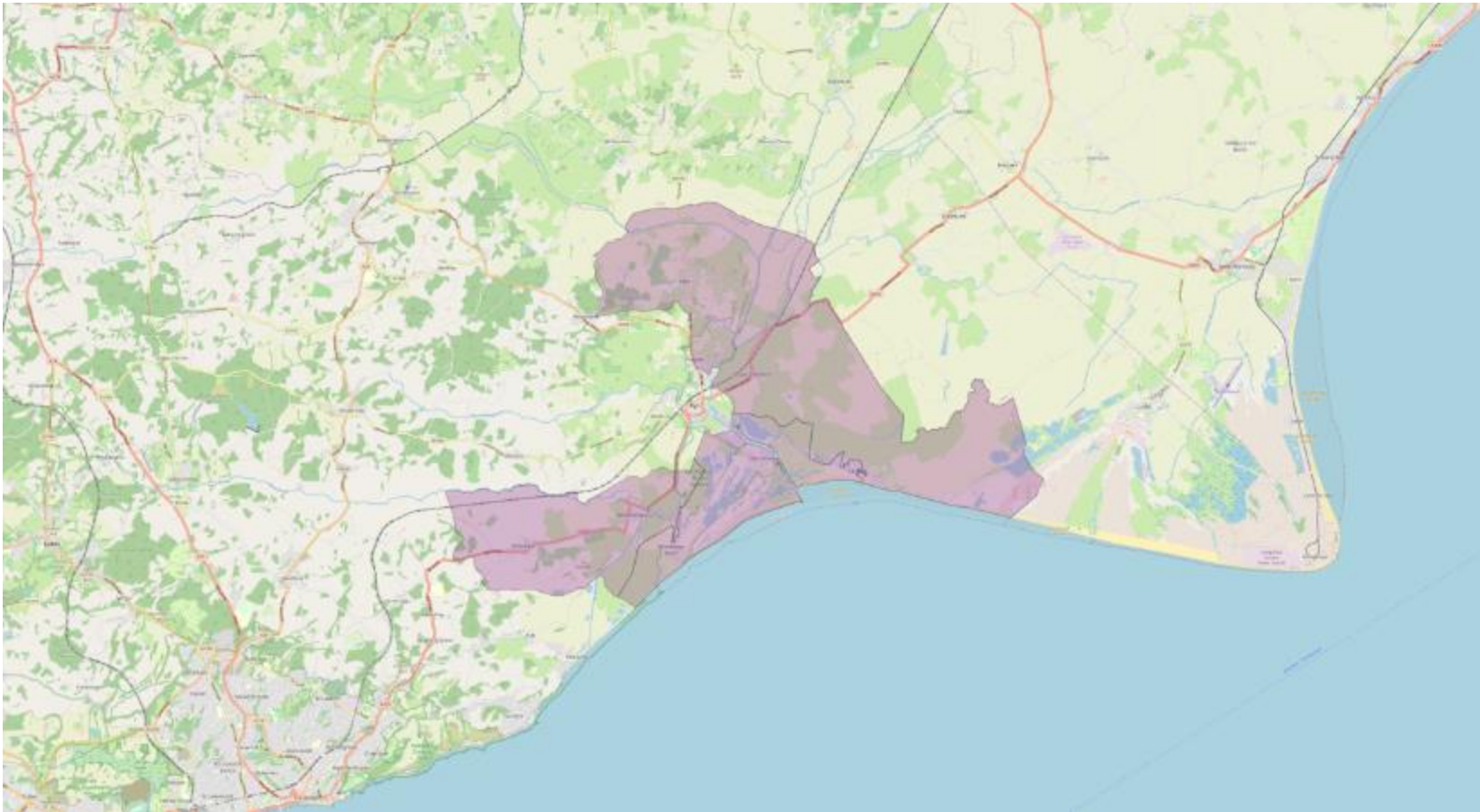
The Area

- **The Eastern Rother** patch hugs the overall eastern border of East Sussex. To the west, it reaches as far as Peasmarsh to the north-west, and just beyond Icklesham to the south-west, while wrapping around Rye closer to the centre of the area

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Executive Summary

Eastern Rother

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- In 2019 Eastern Rother was selected as an area of focus for Making it Happen based on a range of data, perhaps most significantly relating to the isolated, rural nature of the area, numbers of older people living along and a lack of access to services.

- Discovery work by the CDW highlighted opportunities including the development of the Hub on Rye Hill, people moving into the village with energy to galvanise action and under use of local village halls.

- In 2024 new groups have emerged, particularly in relation to environment, but also arts, children and young people, and mental health and wellbeing.

- Some of the assumptions made at the start have proved more challenging than expected. Local village halls have largely been co-opted to support the delivery of essential outreach services, making them unavailable for wider community action. The activities being galvanised by incoming residents frequently don't marry with the interests and passions of long term residents.

- Local shops and events are aimed for the tourist market rather than local residents. There are no local bank branches.

- A key concern of local residents is focused on access to services, which requires major infrastructure support and development beyond the reach of this programme.

- Fantastic grass roots development is taking place. These initiatives are illustrative of the time and patience required to build relationships and trust amongst local residents, and taking small steps to engage around local interests and passions.

- There are more ambitious initiatives, such as Friends Altogether in Rother, keen to encourage links and collaboration between organisations and services, and to tackle chronic issues around loneliness.

- The connection with Rural Pastimes has proved a valuable collaboration to reach local people.

- There are opportunities, such as to learn and build from grass roots projects that have been successful at bringing people together across different demographics, and perhaps through focus on pop up community and community pubs and shops.

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The Picture in 2019

Summary of the 2019 area rationale:

Eastern Rother

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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.

Eastern Rother - 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
- Fuel Poverty
- Early Years Development
- GCSE Attainment
- Adults with No/Low Qualifications
- Pupils with Special Educational Needs
- Socially Rented Households
- GP-reported Obesity in Adults

- Adults in Alcohol Treatment
- 40-74 year olds receiving an NHS Health Check
- People self-reporting bad or very bad health
- People self-reporting a long-term health condition or disability
- GP-reported Hypertension

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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 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 Eastern Rother:

- Income – 3
- Employment - 3
- Education skills and training - 2
- Crime - 2
- Barriers to housing - 1
- Living environment -1
- Geographical barriers - 1

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

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 Eastern Rother:

- Health
- Economy, work and employment
- 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.

- **Red**
  - Local economy
  - Crime and anti-social behaviour

- **Amber**
  - Life satisfaction
  - Education
  - Health
  - Material wellbeing
  - Strong & stable families
  - Belonging
  - Public services

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.

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- **Core areas of focus**
  - Camber
  - Rye Harbour
  - Winchelsea Beach
  - Icklesham

- **Opportunities to build from:**
  - Development of the Hub on Rye Hill
  - Local Parish Chairman connections
  - People moving into the village with more energy to galvanise action
  - Icklesham Parish Community Land Trust development of affordable housing
  - Icklesham Trust plans to develop the Pavilion
  - Active local councillors
  - Winchelsea New Hall successful Awards for All application
  - Local village halls under used
  - Focus on engagement to support delivery of local services to the villages in Eastern Rother

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The Picture in 2024

Eastern Rother
Reflections on developments and change over time

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AREA SNAPSHOT 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.

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- **Engagement via events**
  - Mostly these are held in the summer months or around Christmas- the summer months particularly due to being outdoors as there are not many indoor areas.
  - Can end up being mixed in with tourism as a lot of the events occur in the summer. As this is a coastal area there are often events to attract visitors but not always local residents- this is particularly apparent in Camber.
  - Rural pastimes event proved valuable as a mixing pot of groups and organisations that often don't engage. From this event CDWs were able to access additional funding for use as needed for very small groups.

- **Environment**
  - Keen groups with gardening links and eco green spaces especially around Camber and Rye- including a fantastic composting initiative.

- **Discovery walks in all villages**
  - Mostly sleepy but useful to invite the movers and shakers from each area – great ongoing contacts still almost 5 years on
  - CDW has maintained contact with the people originally invited on the discovery walks, especially those who joined the walk which the Commissioner came on. It made them feel important and valued in the project right from the start.

- **Hub on Rye Hill**
  - This was a focus point to support from the start and they are now up and running – it has become a thriving community space.

- **Wish lists often around capital grants for building works (village halls)**
  - Often being requested by groups who have no idea how to proceed and don't always quite fit with an ABCD approach – but more of a general RVA type work but taking place in an MIH area- but as off shoots from these conversations before they get passed to our General infrastructure colleagues we have been able to grow various groups – one being a start up youth club.

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Key Challenges

CDWs also reflected on challenges that have occurred since 2019:

- **Geographically** Eastern Rother is large and villages are distant from each other

- Villages are individual in the way they do things, and don't always want to be **bundled together**

- Many areas that may seem close on a map are very **distinct** – ie Playden and Rye Foreign (they are separated by a road but each has their own Parish Council etc

- The area only has small pockets of 'known deprivation' ie Tilling Green – but **isolation and loneliness** is prevalent, even in people who may not be economically poor

- This is a large geographical area without many **bumping spaces**

- Often **cafés and village shops** etc in rural villages tend to be rather smart places and expensive – perhaps targeting wealthier residents and tourists – but with no other options for people with less available income this is problematic.

- Many of the village shops now seem to be owned by large franchises, and the people working in them **don't live in the local community**.

- **Banks:** There are no rural bank branches left, making setting up bank accounts hugely problematic.

- Funders don't like many of the purely online banks, but it can be very difficult to find a branch that is close and open at normal times - for instance Metro bank is in either Eastbourne or Ashford and not always open at times when you might expect, so groups organising themselves to even go there can add an extra level of complexity.

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What have you learned?

- That Eastern Rother is a huge area with scattered, distinct villages which is motivated often around summertime visitors. This can be an economic pull for some residents- ie the younger ones working as lifeguards or in the tourism sector – but so many 'real' residents don't actually benefit much.

- Many of the owners or head offices of companies are based elsewhere, so apart from some local wages, the main profits go elsewhere.

- That new people moving to the area may be positive to support the development of new activity, but this often doesn't attract long term residents.

- That bumping spaces are expensive or are avoided by local residents in the high season (such as Camber Beach).

- That village halls in small villages are often used by a pre-school, so not much wriggle room for groups to use them- some are booked 8-4 4/5 days a week by the same user group.

- MIH is making such a difference in many areas, even if they are not classic areas of deprivation. Social isolation is not just an issue those who are economically deprived.

- During Covid many isolated areas actually seemed to become more joined up as things had to happen locally, and to some extent this has continued.

What do you want to share with others?

- The area really lends itself to ABCD – once you have found 'the person' in an area they are often with a little support able to galvanise others to be involved

- That's Small Sparks and Next Steps are the most ABCD. Larger grants than that require greater accountability and that can become prescriptive.

- That the groups we have worked with don't always want money! Often it's much more soft touch and connectors are made that lead on to other things – but this is much harder to capture and evidence.

- That villages within the MIH area often operate across a much wider area.

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Grant Funding

Eastern Rother

(Between April 2020 and December 2024)
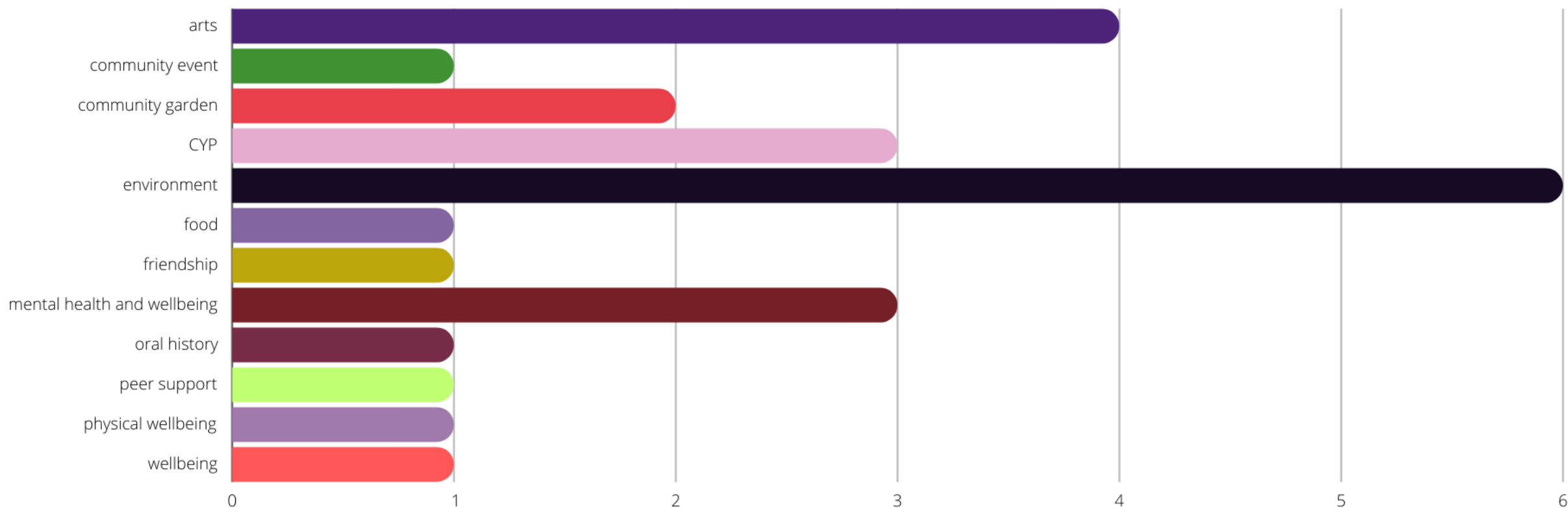
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The Grant Programme

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
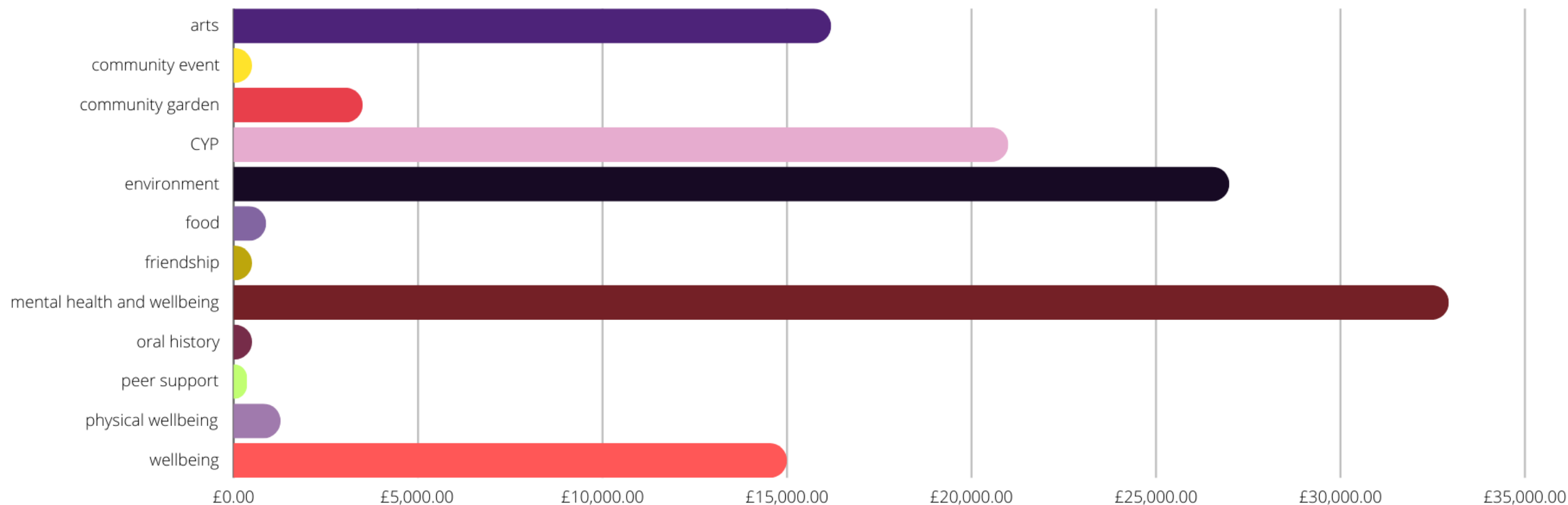
"The project lead reflected that there is now connection between residents that just didn't exist previously. Local councillors have got Involved, and one of the active members of the group recently stood for council. This Is a fantastic example of how Impact ripples out, not just to the creation of new activities, but also to encouraging new connections and, crucially, new types of connections; to people getting involved in new types of activity; and in skill sharing." (MIH team member reflection on a conversation with local community representative from Camber)

Clockwise from top left: *Friends Altogether in Rother; Camber Bookstop; snaps from Rye Community Garden*

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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.
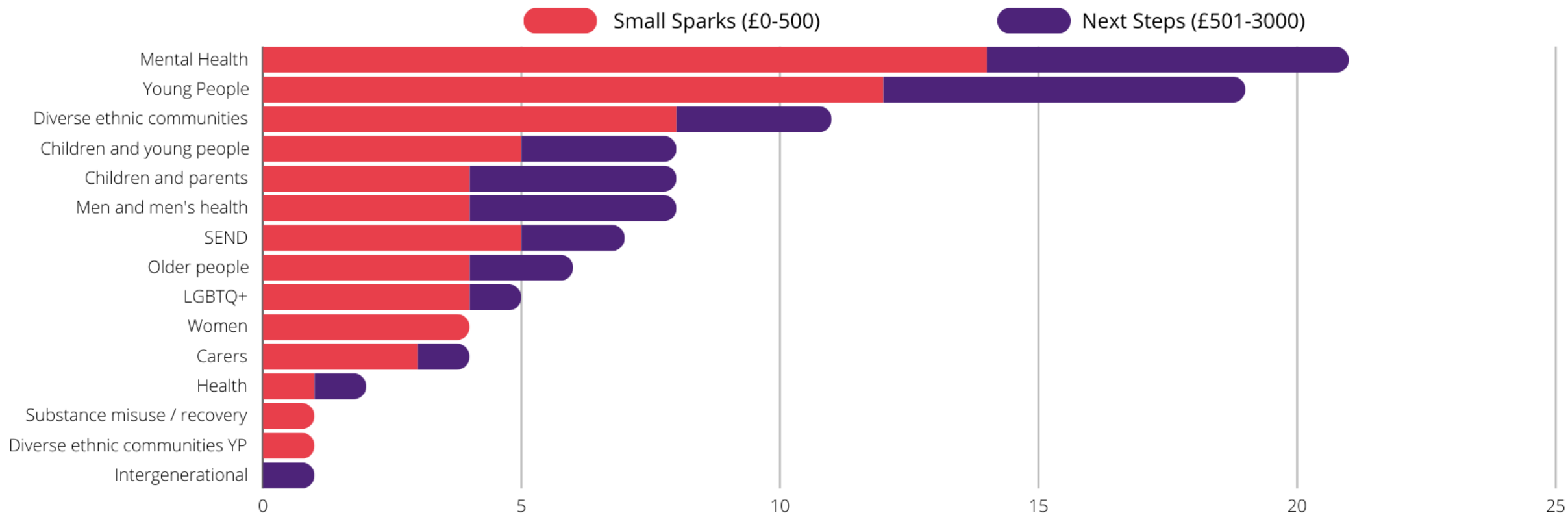
Through the Making it Happen programme we have sought to ensure that we are maximising opportunities to engage with those least likely to be heard.

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:

Legend: Small Sparks (£0-500) | Next Steps (£501-3000)

Categories (top to bottom):
- Mental Health
- Young People
- Diverse ethnic communities
- Children and young people
- Children and parents
- Men and men's health
- SEND
- Older people
- LGBTQ+
- Women
- Carers
- Health
- Substance misuse / recovery
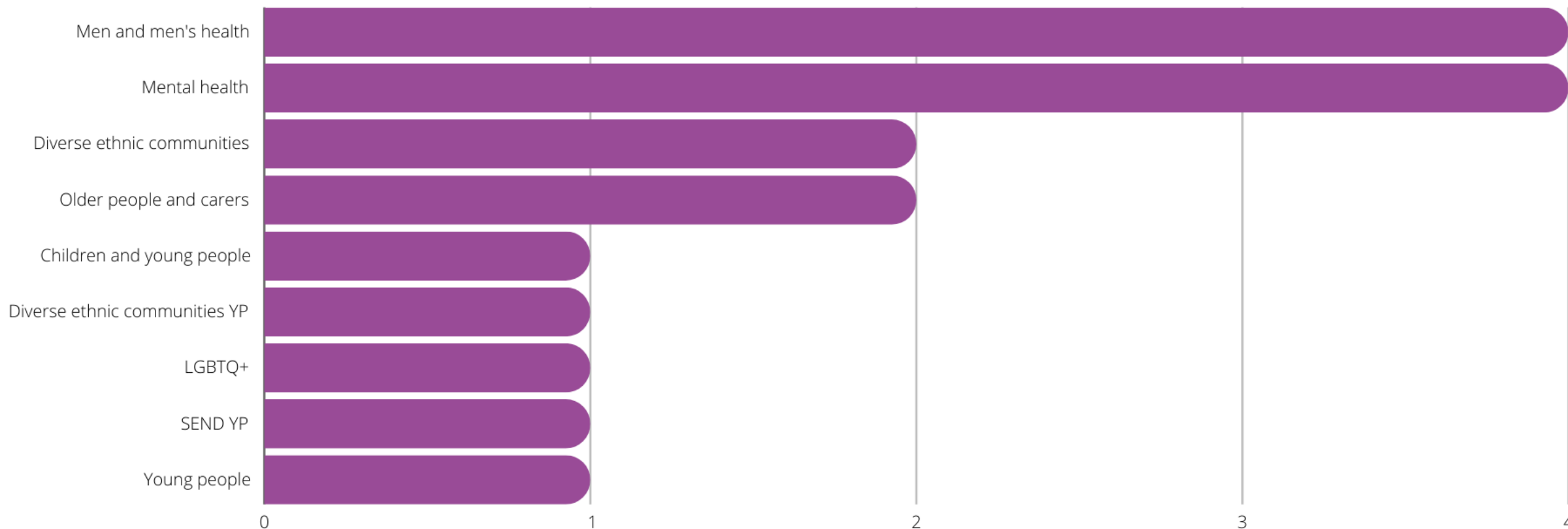- Diverse ethnic communities YP
- Intergenerational

- 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:

Category	Value
Men and men's health	4
Mental health	4
Diverse ethnic communities	2
Older people and carers	2
Children and young people	1
Diverse ethnic communities YP	1
LGBTQ+	1
SEND YP	1
Young people	1

- 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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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 Eastern Rother, 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.

- **Older people**
- **Children and young people**
- **Migrant / refugees / asylum seekers**
- **Substance misuse / recovery**
- **SEND**
- **Women**

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Stage Two Evaluation

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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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STAGE TWO EVALUATION

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

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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

Bexhill Central & Sackville

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- At the start of Making it Happen, key issues flagged by JSNA data included: the high number of older people living alone; income deprivation affecting children; people reporting bad or very bad health; and people with long term health condition or disability. IMD data flagged issues including geographical barriers, living environment and barriers to housing. Challenges including poor relationships and trust and lack of a sense of belonging were highlighted within the Co-op Wellbeing Index and WARM Ward data.

- The CDWs own discovery work carried out in 2019 highlighted a need to focus energy on support to deliver local services to the scattered villages, and the potential for making more of local village halls and community hubs, as well as other opportunities to encourage 'bumping spaces' for social connection.

- The CDWs reflections on their experience and learning over time provides fascinating insight and additional context. Some of the assumptions made at the start about opportunities to build from have proved more complex than initially expected.

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- Local shops and cafes are aimed at the tourist market rather than residents, and are too expensive and don't feel welcoming for local residents. Village Halls have become outposts to support the delivery of services such as pre-school activities, and are not easily available for wider use by the community. Equally, lack of access to other kinds of services is a major preoccupation for local residents, which is more appropriately supported through generic infrastructure rather than ABCD.

- The CDW highlights significant challenges in relation to loneliness and isolation which is compounded by the rural, scattered nature of settlements in the area and lack of opportunity for social connection. As noted, there is a lack of space to accommodate this. Events tend to be focused in the summer months, or at Christmas, and are largely for tourists rather than locals, which compounds this issue further.

- While the energy of those moving into the area can be good for driving projects, there is sometimes a challenge around ensuring those activities also engage long term local residents.

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- There are now no local bank branches. This is problematic in itself, but impacts on community action because funders often distrust online banks. Additionally, many community group accounts *only allow* in person banking, which requires time, effort and resource to travel long distances to the nearest branch, presenting yet more barriers.

- The CDW does also highlight key approaches that have worked well and which are starting to crack some of these challenges. Encouraging local residents to join discovery walks at the start proved an excellent way of initiating relationships. It is striking that those residents who joined a walk which was also attended by the ESCC commissioner have continued to prove particularly active. The CDW reflects that "it made them feel important and valued right from the start".

- These connections have proved vial catalysts to support broader and deeper engagement with other local residents. In Camber a community book stop sparked the development of a book group, a community calendar and a newsletter. The initiative has succeeded in bringing together long term locals with incomers for the first time. Projects like Friends Altogether in Rother are encouraging connections between people but also links with other projects and services. The Hub on Rye Hill has flourished and is now a thriving community space.

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- One event that has proved valuable as a means to connect with local residents is the Rural Pastimes event. This connection also led to the event organisers allocating a pot of funding to be administered by RVA to support micro initiatives driven by local residents.

- Environmental initiatives, including Community Compost Solutions, Wilder Iden and Battle Wildlife Meadow, have sought to turn the rural setting, which for some is proving a negative, into a strength. The projects have proved valuable to draw people together around similar interests and passions. Environmental projects have proved the most popular theme in terms of both the number of grant applications and the amount awarded.

- The positives suggest there may be creative approaches that could be explored. This may require a rethink, around whether and where there might be potential for pop-up community spaces, or community pubs and shops.

- Learning from the initiatives that have worked may offer ideas for solutions to the creation of opportunities that local people feel ownership of whilst maximising tourism opportunities, for example through small scale projects based on common interests, open gardens, gardening events or larger scale environmental initiatives.

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Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

- **Strengths**
  - Evolution of small interest groups encouraging connections, particularly in relation to the environment
  - Connections built at the start who are still involved and who have encouraged broader engagement
  - Development of Rye Hub as a thriving centre
  - Collaboration with Rural Pastimes including the allocation of a grant budget for micro projects
  - Recent initiatives driven by local residents to encourage improved access to services

- **Challenges**
  - Lack of community focused spaces for local residents
  - Lack of events and activities led by and for local residents
  - Lack of access to services
  - Significant challenge around loneliness and isolation
  - No local bank branches

- **Opportunities**
  - Interest in environmental initiatives
  - Collaboration with Rural Pastimes
  - Learning from initiatives that have worked which have successfully brought communities together (such as in Camber) or have created different kinds of bumping spaces (such as the Community River Watch project)
  - Potential for pop up community spaces, and community pubs or shops

- **Threats**
  - 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