Building community power in practice:

How the people of East Sussex have 'made it happen'

An evaluation of the Making it Happen programme (2019–2025)

MAKING IT HAPPEN

BASKING IN THE LOVE

Front cover and previous page: artwork by participants in the Compass Arts project

Opposite page: Arts On Prescription community outside the Art in the Park venue

Contents

Foreword

The possibilities for a healthier county for now and future generations lie within our communities and our relationships with them. Too many people are currently dying 'before their time' because of who we are, or the places we live. This is driven by inequalities in people's circumstances, such as access to good work or clean air, or the shared belief that people have a say over the matters that shape our lives.

Communities with the worst outcomes are not only denied the material resources necessary to make healthy choices, but this lack of control is psychologically harmful. When decisions that affect our lives are not felt to be influenceable, the future of the things we care about deeply can feel out-of-our-hands. At its worst, this can lead to an acceptance that this is 'just the way things are', whereby people are less likely to seek support or make the healthy choices. This report shows what can begin to happen when the mission is for people to have increased control, even when times are tough. It is a story about the art and power of seeing things differently through a small shift in mindsets, including through seeing what is strong, ahead of what is wrong.

Despite the individual challenges being experienced by people, we are surrounded by a world of amazing things brought into being despite the barriers people face. Their courage and generosity have led to a richness of health creating activities. Local green spaces received new leases of life. People found new joys in cooking, fishing, singing, and dancing. Men talked more openly about their feelings. People helped each other to grieve. They presented evidence to MPs and Peers on their lived experience, performed for the Proms, reimagined public places, and opened-up new spaces where people feel welcomed.

To build a healthy society we need all the right building blocks of health in place – good jobs, social connections, healthy environments. Making it Happen demonstrates how communities are going about arranging these blocks themselves, whilst pointing to other blocks they need some help with.

Stories of change that are part of Making it Happen show the different ways communities are working with what is 'to-hand' in any given situation to create good health. The existence of this activity provides an opportunity for others to come alongside and see where they can add help. We need more residents involved in nurturing neighbourhoods and designing services to meet their needs. This relational way of making change together improves our capabilities and agency to make changes together through empowered ways of working, for residents, patients, council staff, councillors and colleagues in local partner organisations. The change to a 'strengths' mindset helps us to see how to lead and to be led from the ground-up and outwards to form effective cross-sector collaborations.

The impacts of what we evaluate are often unseen until after the evaluators are gone. Given the transformational impact seen in certain areas of change, the ripple effects will be long lasting. The mindsets, values, and conditions of the new Community and VCSE Development Programme will further help to ensure a legacy in terms of 'how things are done around here'.

Many of today's big health problems such as loneliness, stress, obesity, and addictions cannot solely be fixed for us by somebody else, whether from the NHS, local council, or voluntary sector service providers. It is time to think differently, not in term of how 'we' can harness the capacity of our local people, but by nurturing the equal and reciprocal relationships needed for joint problem solving and by helping to give voice to diversity. There is mounting evidence of the powerfulness of people and communities self-organising, enabled through local institutions. This report points to some the conditions that would further support communities to exercise their control to reduce inequalities in East Sussex together.

Darrell Gale
ESCC Director of Public Health

Above: POP group art installation
Opposite: Final celebration event
Credit for both: Clive Jarman

Introduction

About this report

Making it Happen was a multi-year programme fostering the adoption of asset-based community development approaches for supporting East Sussex residents to make change where they live, improving their health and wellbeing. This report documents learning through the last phase of the Making it Happen programme about how, why and for whom it has worked. It reflects the experiences of many different people involved in the programme, from those embedded in activities on the ground, to the teams of Community Development Workers assisting them, to wider stakeholders whose lives and work have been touched by the programme – from the voluntary and community, private and public sectors.

The report demonstrates how, through Making it Happen, East Sussex has become a hotspot for modelling and expanding asset-based practice and principles, revitalising and cultivating assets and community infrastructure in communities, and instilling a culture of collaboration and learning across the system. First, we cover the practice of ABCD and what it enables; second, the assets unlocked through an ABCD way of working; and third, how developing assets at different levels builds (or at least builds conditions for) collective efficacy and voice. We propose that much of this development constitutes growth in different forms of social capital[1], contributing to community power[2] and resilience. In the final section of the

report, we note what the system can learn from the programme to expand asset-based community development, and more reciprocal relationships of joint problem-solving.

Among the dozens of projects, activities and events that MiH has supported to start and grow, we have selected five (one from each geographic area – see Figure B on pages 14–15) whose stories we thread through all sections of the report. We tell their stories in greater detail than the other projects. The five that you'll hear about in each section are not any more important than the others; rather, they are indicative of the three areas of focus named above, while others are referenced where relevant to an insight. As described in the Methodology section, much of our evidence is based on stories and other qualitative information gathered from the programme, which ranges in scope. To bring cohesion to the report, we thread these five projects throughout to illustrate insights from the view of the same project. They also make clear that no story is singular; evidence

1 *Social capital, for the purposes of this report, expresses the nature and quality of the associational ties between people. These links constitute a public good from which people can (but do not universally) benefit. Building on the work of political scientist Robert D. Putnam (1995) and others, we organise insights in the section of this report about assets along the lines of types of social capital, including: bonding, bridging and linking.*

2 *Community power is, for the purposes of this report, the ability of people to collectively exercise control and influence over decisions and other things that affect their lives.*

suggests that MiH groups and projects are often reflective of multiple types of impact.

This report is meant to provoke action by organisations in the programme's universe and beyond; the end of MiH need not be the end of the learning process, particularly as discourse, commissioning and policymaking is increasingly centring communities as leading change.

About Making it Happen

Commissioned by East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Public Health department, Making it Happen (MiH) sought to reduce health inequalities and bolster people's capacity to thrive and lead healthy lives. It specifically took an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to do this, strengthening local community capacity for collective action and greater wellbeing. ABCD is a locally-specific way of working that fosters connections between people and mobilises them to realise and develop their strengths – starting from what is strong, not what is wrong.

The MiH programme was in operation for over five years, from October 2019 to March 2025. In that time, hundreds of people were involved in activities across East Sussex, supported by 15 Community Development Workers (CDWs) at the five local organisations that delivered the programme: 3VA, Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS), Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA), Rother Voluntary Action (RVA) and Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA).

Each organisation and its team of two to three CDWs focused on specific priority areas of Wealden District, Rother District, Eastbourne Borough, Hastings Borough and Lewes District. These neighbourhoods were selected based on desk research including review of indices of deprivation alongside discovery activity to identify the presence of local assets and opportunities, plus appetite

for change. CDWs brought and developed hyper-local knowledge and connections to their roles – a great benefit to community members they supported – including connections that became essential to changes to the social networks and other assets in a place.

MiH distributed funding through three different types of grants: Small Sparks grants (up to £500), Next Steps grants (up to £3,000), and Grow Grants (up to £15,000). In total, 363 grants were awarded, amounting to over £913,000. The largest in number were the 221 Small Sparks grants, which totalled £98,287. These supported early-stage ideas and helped remove barriers to participation. The programme allocated 102 Next Steps grants, distributing £264,474 for projects ready to accelerate. Lastly, 41 Grow Grants were offered to more established projects to further their momentum, totalling £551,205.

Out of an interest in qualitative over quantitative metrics, MiH tracked not the numbers of people reached but the meaningful connections (meaningful to the CDWs) – the kinds and depth of connections formed, from sharing information and signposting to hosting introductions and providing support for collaboration. The reported number of these interactions since 2020 totals 2644, of which we have analysed a subset from each geographic area that went the most in depth and were representative of the four shifts in our analytical framework. This data was not captured uniformly across areas over time but still sheds light on the activities of CDWs, and its inclusion as a metric at all signals the programme's commitment to valuing relational change.

These meaningful connections fed into a highly varied array of activities, reflecting the programme's responsiveness to different interests from community members in local action. Across the full dataset of evidence, MiH has supported small groups of one to five people to larger gatherings of 20+ people, which were arts-based, environmentally-oriented, peer support-focussed, etc. MiH did

not prescribe a single model of change, a testament to the flexibility of the programme. People instead created conditions for ideas to emerge through individual confidence building, networking and collaboration, and civic participation – all shaped by individuals, relationships and context.

Table 1 illustrates how participation emerged in different forms and settings and details the types of activities using examples of projects. Some activities and groups were open to all while others narrowed in on a locality (e.g. an estate) or community of interest or identity, including those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act. As data collection in asset-based, community-led programmes can be offputting and impede trust, the programme deliberately did not systematically collect information on participating individuals' identities. Nevertheless, delivery plans and meaningful connections provide some indication of for whom activities were intended, including: children and young people, disabled people, those in recovery, carers, and LGBTQ+ individuals and families.

While voluntary,community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) partners have been instrumental to roll-out of the programme in the places where they have existing portfolios of work and relationships, MiH has a wider scope than the VCSE. Learning from the programme highlights pre-conditions, conditions and outcomes that can lead or have led to shifts in communities and places, which cut across sectors and have bearing on models of community development and service provision alike.

Shifts are starting to manifest as the way of working at the core of MiH spreads, reflected in comments from local government colleagues like: "This is the best programme I have ever seen In East Sussex", and, "If only all programmes were like this". The resonance of MiH also shows in its nomination by the Royal Society for Public Health as a finalist at the 2024 RSPH Health & Wellbeing Awards, its inclusion as a case study in *Building Thriving Neighbourhoods: The Locality Manifesto*[3], and its presence at conferences of the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and Locality.

Table 1

Scale of group	Types of activity	Examples
Small numbers of people meeting regularly	Peer support circles, meet-ups, warm spaces, informal drop-ins	RunningSpace (suicide prevention circle), Start 2 Finish (mental health and recovery peer group), Social Sundays (crafting drop-in)
Groups with more structure and goals	Cafés, play groups, guided creative or gardening sessions	Arts on Prescription (creative activities for mental health and wellbeing), Youth Voice (Cup of Joy youth mental health café)
Gatherings of multiple groups	Collaborations, learning communities, knowledge exchanges, civic forums	Blueprint for Beyond (increasing access to green spaces), Community Table gatherings (peer learning network events)
Open days or events where there is wider public participation	Community meals, open garden events, showcases, festivals and celebrations, networking events	Open day at Rye Garden (inviting involvement in the garden), Hastings Area Southern Housing Tenants Association launch party

3 *Building Thriving Neighbourhoods: The Locality Manifesto, Locality, 2023. (See this source.)*

Methodology

Above: Gardening Our Streets, Hastings

Collaborate CIC were appointed as evaluators to explore if, how, why and for whom MiH works in the areas where it has been delivered – to interpret and understand the change MiH has made as well as the conditions that enable and hinder that change. From the outset, our approach has reflected a principle of 'from the work, through the work', adopting methods that align with what is happening in order that those closest to the work are able to direct and capture evidence that is meaningful and valuable to them. We designed the evaluation to be not an additional activity but part of the work of the programme. To that end, the methods of data collection that we have used reflect how the programme operated and what those closest to the work saw as significant. These methods have lent themselves to narrative approaches rather than numeric.

The first year of our evaluation took place during the second of three programme phases, as another organisation had evaluated the initial phase. For Phase Two, we co-developed an analytical framework called the 'Four Shifts' model with CDWs, which maps four shifts towards more asset-based ways of working along various levels or scales at which shifts may take place. (See Figure A on page 13.) This framework became an accessible and practical tool, even a form of shorthand in conversations, to marry theory and practice. We reviewed key documentation and adapted evidence collection methods to gather data from

participants and lead facilitators of projects, activities and events as well as CDWs. We produced an **Interim Evaluation Report** consolidating evidence from the first year of our evaluation (Phase Two of the programme).

In the second year of our evaluation (Phase Three of the programme), we have further honed evidence collection in specific areas that we identified as warranting more focus after the interim report, largely having to do with what enabled people to participate and what capabilities they built. So, in addition to the core evidence collection mechanisms from the first year of working on the evaluation, we have drawn insights from analysis of data from two workshops and reflections on what has made people feel welcome in groups and at events. Workshops were focused on understanding what makes activities inclusive of diverse communities and building groups' capability to recognise and highlight the value their work brings.

Table 2 lists core evidence collection methods that were used to collect data for this report over the multiple years of our evaluation. In addition to these core evidence collection methods, delivery plans (produced with grant recipients), reflection notes, anecdotes, and project reports also informed the report, as did short films from a series titled **Phenomenal Happenings**, produced by Latest TV. These films are linked throughout this report where we mention the group or project featured.

Table 2

Evidence collection method	Data collected
Grant Reviews: A template with questions to guide a conversation between CDW and grantee about successes, challenges, outcomes and support from MiH.	199 grant reviews
Stories: A template for the CDW to complete with questions on who participated, learning and lessons for the wider system based on the 'four shifts'.	87 stories
Meaningful Connections: A spreadsheet tracking the kinds of interactions CDWs have had with MiH participants. Each entry includes multiple connections.	154 entries
Stakeholder Survey: A survey to capture formal system stakeholders' understanding of and experience with MiH and ABCD to understand the influence each has had on the system.	58 responses
Community Survey: A survey for community members who have led on and participated in MiH activities to gather thoughts and feelings about the quality of support from CDWs, impacts in line with the 'four shifts', and information about accessibility.	87 responses
Events and workshops: Notes from Big Sparks and Four Shifts events plus workshops to exchange ideas and reflections on the topics of storytelling and inclusion.	Notes from 2 events and 2 workshops
Sensemaking Sessions: Meetings with CDWs, ESCC, MiH delivery organisations, NHS, Core Group and Academic Advisory Group members to look at emerging patterns in the analysis, bring in insight from others to help interpret and check evaluation insights – grounding the analysis in the realities of those closest to the communities involved.	Notes from 4 sensemaking sessions

Analysis

A key factor of our methodology is the level of confidence we have in different pieces of insight. For the interim report, we implemented a deductive approach to analysis using the analytical framework indicators as codes for theming evidence. In other words, we sought to confirm whether and how we were seeing change using indicators – potential conditions for asset-based approaches to flourish – that we derived from the initial programme theories for the evaluation and CDWs' own theories of change. For Phase Three, we have used more of an inductive approach by drawing out novel findings and cross-

referencing with interim report findings to identify repetition and any additional nuance/detail. We have followed up on the recommendations we made in the interim report in this report, building upon the learning from that report.

The MiH programme management team and CDWs contributed to the data coding process for the analysis that fed into this report, which has resulted in more co-produced analysis informed by their perspectives of greater proximity to programme activities as well as our own. Additionally, we held two sensemaking sessions in this final phase of the programme: one with lead facilitators

of projects and CDWs and another with CDWs and staff from ESCC, VCSE and NHS colleagues, and representatives from the Academic Advisory Group to the project. Sensemaking sessions are a check on our own biases as researchers and ensure a richness of perspectives in the process of honing how, why and for whom MiH has worked. These sessions helped direct our attention to particularly salient insights.

How, why, and for whom it happens: a fuller picture

Summary

How MiH worked:

- The programme has enabled people to shift the conditions of their lives by growing their power to control their lives as well as their social capital to exercise that control.
- Despite a pervasive feeling of powerlessness, people's involvement (as CDWs, lead project facilitators, volunteers and other participants) in MiH activities has built confidence and capability.
- The asset-based way of working that CDWs and lead project facilitators have enacted has been instrumental to growing community power and social capital, as well as community infrastructure[4] through the activation of physical assets.

Why MiH worked:

- An entire way of working has been modelled by people with different positions in the programme, expressing a relational, systems approach to change which recognises that people and their

4 *Community infrastructure is defined (as identified by HM Government in 2022 in the* Rapid evidence review of community initiatives*) as "the physical infrastructure within the community (including places, spaces and facilities) that supports the formation and development of social networks and relationships". (See* this source*.)*

lives are complex and individuals are situated in webs of relation.
- Flexible funding with low barriers to access and reporting requirements and no specification to work to specific timelines made a difference for opening doors to a variety of groups and projects. CDWs were not responsible for meeting KPIs but rather building supportive relationships and helping people achieve their goals.
- A culture of learning proliferated amongst CDWs through peer support and community groups themselves have played a role in leading learning and embedding ABCD.

For whom MiH worked:

- People who haven't come for charity or services have realised benefits regardless, including through self-help. MiH activities have in most if not all cases been advertised in ways that have been informal and expansive, in contrast with being charity- or service-oriented.
- People in need of a non-judgmental space, especially those struggling with something that might otherwise be misunderstood or stigmatised. These are experiences that are in contrast with how people can sometimes be received when interacting with formal services.
- People who benefited from a feeling of safety, most often out of solidarity through shared experience but also through connecting in spite of their differences.

The task of the evaluation has been to determine 'if, how and why, the programme works, and for whom, within the areas where it has happened. Our interim report on Phase Two of the programme established that there is plentiful evidence affirmatively answering the question of 'if' the programme works to support people to foster connections and strengthen capacity and capability for healthier communities. Additionally, we now have feedback from

Figure A
The Four Shifts

	Deficits to strengths	Central to local	Isolation to collaboration	Assuming and prescribing to learning and responding
Within a person	People recognise their own skills, capabilities and contributions	People feel they have the ability to influence what happens in their community	Learning skills improves self-esteem and confidence	People recognise the value of their own experience and feel confident to articulate it
Person to person	People recognise their complementary skills, capabilities and contributions	Social networks change in diversity and type as community members connect and support one-another	Trust is built between people, fostering resilient and integrated communities	Groups express collective purpose and ambition
Between people and services	Services have different conversations with people – starting with what's strong, not what's wrong	VCSE organisations and services engage with existing community-led groups to understand a place	Formal and informal organisations/groups make connections Communities and	VCSE organisations and services jointly problem-solve
Between services and services and beyond	VCSE organisations and services adopt asset-based approaches e.g. opportunities to influence commissioning	VCSE organisations and services work together in a place-based way Professionals are	incentivised and given permission to collaborate and see the benefit Services work together	to hear and prioritise community voices, sharing what they learn

grant recipients between 2022 and 2024 suggesting extremely positive perceptions of the value and impact of the support they received.

On average, 62.4% of respondents strongly agreed that their project has helped them achieve something that they wanted to do, with another 30.9% agreeing. Respondents reported that their projects had helped improve personal and community wellbeing, build stronger networks, and in many cases led to follow-on activity or ripple-effects beyond their initial grant. While the number of reviews per period was modest, the consistency of these responses suggest appreciation for the support and benefits of small-scale investments for meaningful, self-directed change.

Below, we expand on what we have learned about the fuller picture of 'how', 'why' and 'for whom' it worked. In doing so, and throughout the rest of the report, five examples reflect different ways that community-led projects take form, shaped by local needs, priorities, and people.

A few, like Explore The Arch, were established before MiH but have expanded with MiH funding in new directions.

Others, like Peacehaven Centre and Mosque had started but have grown tremendously in the time since receiving MiH support.

Others, like Shinewater Hub Gardens, Selby Meadows, and Bexhill Men's Shed, have grown from the ground up through MiH.

They vary also in who is involved and the ways in which people have come together. Their purposes differ, too; some convene for the physical space, others for creative expression or peer support – but all of the stories speak to how people, when supported to take the lead, can gain and share knowledge, find belonging and influence long-term change in their communities.

While these projects highlight what is possible when communities take the lead, the full potential of ABCD will be realised when institutions and services find ways to work alongside communities, which informs our recommendations in the 'Learning for the system' section of this report.

Selby Meadows is a community green space lovingly maintained by a dedicated group of local residents of all ages and abilities. The project focuses on preserving and enhancing the natural environment while fostering a sense of connection through hands-on involvement. The meadow is open daily for everyone to enjoy, offering a peaceful spot for relaxation and community interaction. Regular events, such as 'Wake up The Meadow' garden gatherings, invite people to take part in activities like gardening, socialising over free teas and coffees, and collectively caring for the space. The group also uses its Facebook page to share updates, celebrate community efforts, and invite wider participation, making the project feel open and welcoming to all. Selby Meadows exemplifies how community-led initiatives can transform and sustain public spaces, nurturing both the environment and the bonds among those who cherish it.

Peacehaven Centre and Mosque is a space that adapts and evolves with the people who use it. It is a faith space, a social space, and a gathering place where women create opportunities for themselves, young people step into leadership, and where knowledge is intergenerational. Cultural storytelling, skill-sharing, and peer-led initiatives are determined by those who are involved. By centring relationships, trust and community-led action, it reinforces that meaningful spaces are not just built but continually redefined by the people who make the space their own.

Shinewater Hub Gardens is a community-led green space where residents have transformed an underused area into a thriving garden for food growing, rewilding, and social connection. More than just a place to plant, it has become a hub for skill-sharing, environmental learning, and local collaboration. Residents have worked together to navigate challenges–from addressing flooding issues to negotiating governance structures–demonstrating how collective action shapes and sustains community assets. The garden continues to evolve based on the interests and needs of those involved, showing that when people have the space and support to take the lead, they build not only infrastructure but also trust, resilience, and a stronger sense of ownership over their local environment.

Bexhill Men's Shed is a community space where men come together to share skills, work on practical projects, and build social connections in a supportive, informal setting. Woodworking, repairs, and community projects provide an entry point, but the Shed[5] is just as much about fostering conversation, mutual support, and maintaining wellbeing through hands-on engagement. Participation is self-directed – some join to learn new skills, some to mentor others, and some for companionship. By creating a low-pressure space where relationships develop naturally, the Shed exemplifies that community support and wellbeing are strengthened not only through structured learning, but through shared purpose, peer mentorship, and a sense of belonging.

WEALDEN

LEWES

ROTHER

HASTINGS

EAST-BOURNE

Figure B

Five example projects

Explore The Arch creates opportunities for people to engage with the arts, question dominant narratives, and explore their personal and cultural identities in ways that feel meaningful to them. Through theatre, installations, and interactive creative projects, participants step into roles as storytellers, performers, and cultural leaders. The project also supports early-career practitioners – particularly those facing barriers to access opportunities – by providing training and employment in creative, heritage, and community arts. By shifting creative leadership into the hands of participants and emerging leaders, Explore The Arch challenges traditional models of who directs artistic and cultural spaces.

5 *The Men in Sheds concept originated in Australia in the 1990s to tackle social isolation and ill health in older men before spreading to elsewhere, including the UK. There are now over 2500 Sheds, which are places for men to pursue practical interests and build and share skills, and in the process build connections and friendships in a supportive setting.*

Above: Artwork by Compass Arts participant

Lead by stepping back

Residents lead the change they want to see

Champion equality and justice

Encourage equality and social justice; who is not being heard?

Support communities to take a lead

Value everyone's voice and contribution

How **Communities** Make it Happen

Start small

Start with what is already present

Build relationships

Take time to listen, learn and share ideas

Make connections

Connect people with other people and local resources

How MiH worked: growing social capital and community power

There is heightened recognition in this moment of the impact of the conditions of our lives and places on health and wellbeing. The MiH original specification (ESCC, 2019) for the programme was ahead of the curve, having been built upon data on the social determinants of health[6]. MiH was born from a recognition that health is about more than health services – it is about everything that makes a healthy society. Key headlines in terms of how MiH has worked speak to how the programme has enabled people to shift the conditions of their lives: by growing their power to control their lives as well as their social capital to exercise that control.

Public Health England recognised the impact of social determinants of health in 2020, stating, "Community life, the places where people live, and having social connections and a voice in local decisions, are all factors that make a vital contribution to health and wellbeing and help buffer against disease"[7]. That year, a follow-up report on the landmark Marmot Review – which described how inequalities in health reflect the conditions of people's lives – suggested that many of the same health inequalities from 2010 had persisted. Among other things, the report outlined that reducing health inequalities would require enabling people to maximise their capabilities and exercise control over their lives, and require creating and developing healthy and sustainable places and communities[8].

---

6 *Social determinants of health encapsulate the socioeconomic and environmental conditions influencing disparities in health status. These exist throughout people's lives and in the places where they live, learn, work, play, etc.*

7 Community-centred public health: Taking a whole system approach, *Public Health England, 2020.*

8 Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On, *Institute of Health Equity, 2020.*

With increased power and control over the conditions of their lives, people can not only influence factors that impact their health but also reduce health risks that arise from a lack of control[9]. Despite years of data on the benefits of community power and social capital in promoting health, recent polls show 84% of Brits feel powerless, up from 71% in 2018[10]. Stories from MiH echo this feeling, but also indicate that people's involvement (as CDWs, lead project facilitators, volunteers and other participants) in MiH activities changes it. In describing their experience of working in this climate of disempowerment, one CDW said, "At least in this job I can witness that change is happening on a small scale. The change is happening, it's just not visible [yet] in the grand scheme of things."

The recent Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods' report on the state of neighbourhoods across England notes that evidence strongly suggests that the biggest barrier to the ability of neighbourhoods to thrive is "a lack of the right kinds of social capital", citing studies on social capital's influence, for example, on the positive relationship between higher levels of social capital and health[11]. A recent report published by Demos in partnership with Local Trust and 3ni similarly proposes that social capital not only has demonstrable effects at the individual level but also at the collective level (as 'collective efficacy') including by building trust and nurturing common values[12].

The asset-based way of working that CDWs and lead project facilitators have enacted has been instrumental to growing community power and social capital, as well as community infrastructure[13] through the activation of physical assets. In the following sections, we draw on a number of examples to detail the components of this way of working and what has been built as a result, including: new and shared skills; relationships across differences and between those with similar experiences; exchanges across groups; and access to places to gather, play and learn.

Models for understanding wellbeing tend to be individualising, emphasising things like choice, behaviour and self-management whereas the emphasis of MiH has been on situating the individual within the collective. Relatedly, the Four Shifts framework by which we have conducted analysis for the evaluation looks not just at shifts within a person but between people, between people and services and between services and beyond. Nonetheless, the programme has cast light on changes to personal wellbeing, as noted at various points throughout the report.

Why MiH worked: a common way of working and culture of learning

As outlined in the headline findings of our interim report, the 'why' of MiH's impact comes down to a few key features: the enactment of ABCD, the accessibility and relationality of funding, the provision of supports for people involved in projects (particularly through the role of the CDW), a focus on the local, and a prioritisation of learning between practitioners and with wider stakeholders. Evidence from the third phase of the programme reaffirms the significance of these key features and has further developed our understanding of the difference that these key features have made in 'why' MiH has worked.

A way of working

MiH centred on an ABCD approach to building the confidence, capability and capacity of people to make things happen together in their local areas. CDWs had dedicated time for assisting people flexibly across the lifecycle of their projects and groups, in the capacities of trusted advisors, system navigators and area connectors. Lead project facilitators reflected the same principles and practices in how they worked with volunteers and participants in their groups, events and other activities, upholding a fundamental belief in each person's agency and strengths.

"Making it Happen isn't just a programme — it's a way of working that values the passions, skills, and drive of local people."

Community Development Worker

The enactment of ABCD became not merely a facet of the programme but an entire way of working, modelled in their own ways by people with different positions in the programme. "Making it Happen isn't just a programme – it's a way of working that values the passions, skills, and drive of local people," one CDW commented. Another CDW similarly suggested, "I would say that for the majority of us workers this programme has changed our vision of the world. It is a role for people who think 'cup half full'." We will explore more about these approaches and how both CDWs and programme participants alike (and increasingly, others in the VCSE, local government, and the health system) have put them to use in the final section of "Learning for the system".

What is perhaps most noteworthy about this way of working is the way in which it runs counter to the dominant Western cultural understanding of self-actualisation as something to earn over one's life versus something innate, and something disconnected from communal life. In MiH, everyone has value, and self-actualisation is connected to community-actualisation[14].

9   Control and health inequalities: A review of theory and evidence for practitioners, *New Economics Foundation, 2020.* (*See this source.*)

10 *What do the public think about devolution and community power? We're Right Here, February 2025.* (*See this source.*)

11 Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy changes, *Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 2025.* (*See this source.*)

12 The Hidden Wealth of Nations, *Demos, Local Trust and 3ni, 2025* (*See this source.*)

13 *Community infrastructure is defined (as identified by HM Government in 2022 in* the Rapid evidence review of community initiatives*) as "the physical infrastructure within the community (including places, spaces and facilities) that supports the formation and development of social networks and relationships".*

14 *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a well-known illustration of a Western conception of the concept of actualisation. A young Maslow visited Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in what is now called Canada for six weeks in 1938 and was likely influenced by them. In alignment with their teachings, Maslow came to understand self-actualisation, which fed into the paper in which he introduced the Hierarchy of Needs. Through the popularisation of his model, self-actualisation (the realisation of one's potential) became the highest human need, despite it having been a foundational element of Blackfoot ways of being. Moreover, Maslow in* fact came to understand that "self-actualization is not enough", having encountered that the Blackfoot way of meeting basic needs and creating conditions for people to enact their purpose were collective responsibilities. In an unpublished essay from 1966, "Critique of Self Actualization Theory", Maslow wrote that "self actualization is not enough. Personal salvation and what is good for the person alone cannot be really understood in isolation…It is quite clear that purely inter-psychic individualist psychology without reference to other people and social conditions is not adequate." (*See this source.*)

MAKING IT HAPPEN

This way of working expresses a relational, systems approach to change, recognising that people and their lives are complex and individuals are situated in webs of relation. One CDW described what this has entailed: "MiH has worked directly with grass roots groups and individuals, taking time to walk alongside and support them at their developmental pace, helping them to draw out their strengths and attributes."

There is heightened recognition in this moment of the impact of the conditions of our lives and places on health and wellbeing.

MiH activities may have come to be without CDWs, but likely not in the same way. Without CDWs assistance, advocacy and mediation, activities may have stalled or floundered. Though the ways of working at the centre of this programme are often characterised as 'soft', evidence collected through the evaluation points to a robustness and rigour, a relentlessness by CDWs and community members to push through challenges and work around barriers. ABCD was an established field prior to MiH but the programme has demonstrated a diversity of ways of enacting the principles and practice.

Start small

Build relationships

A culture of learning

Another answer to why MiH has been a success is the creation of a culture of learning amongst stakeholders involved in the programme. In the interim report, we addressed the importance of adopting a learning approach when working in the complex world of community work, where there is no direct line between inputs and outcomes, and instead, a need to situate oneself in an environment that is constantly changing and accept 'failure' (in fact, they understood that there was no such thing as failure) as part of adaptation.

They have operated with a recognition of the potential for reciprocal learning, viewing activities as offering opportunities for growth for themselves as well as community groups. Flexible funding with low barriers to access and reporting requirements and no specification to work to specific timelines made a difference for opening doors to a variety of groups and projects, and also meant a shift in the orientation of the CDW from being responsible for KPIs to being responsible for building supportive relationships and helping people achieve their goals[15]. One CDW reflected: "[MiH] was successful because the workers on

---

15 *This aligns with an emerging approach to public service and social action called Human Learning Systems, which encourages leaving behind a 'New Public Management' approach based on 'Markets, Managers and Metrics' in favour of embracing the complexity of the real world, creating an environment in which improvement is driven by continuous learning.*

---

the program [sic] were not hindered by a constant need to prove themselves and the community via KPIs. Having benchmark dates for things to be achieved like collective community events helped to motivate but [deadlines] don't work in a community scenario because neighbourhood [working] is complicated; it takes time to build contacts and then work together."

Having structures of peer support such as team meetings within organisational teams and Operational Delivery Team meetings across organisational teams running in parallel with the programme allowed them time for "reflections, asking for help, sharing what has worked well and also offering a space for people who come up against barriers and need some ideas." (CDW) Those meetings "were always grounding and energising, a reminder that we were all in it together, doing our best with a shared passion for the work and the communities we supported. Each meeting spurred me on, reinforcing that we were part of a system that valued real stories over just numbers and strategies." (CDW)

We've seen over the third phase of the programme how this culture of learning has extended beyond the CDWs. Community groups themselves have played a role in leading learning and embedding ABCD informally and in ways that treat knowledge

In MiH, everyone has value, and self-actualisation is connected to community-actualisation. This way of working expresses a relational, systems approach to change, recognising that people and their lives are complex and individuals are situated in webs of relation.

"Each meeting spurred me on, reinforcing that we were part of a system that valued real stories over just numbers and strategies."
Community Development Worker

as a process of inquiry rather than a "gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" as if depositing into a bank[16]. For example, at the People's Knowledge Exchange organised by Hospitable Environment, over 100 people explored how creativity and connected communities can lead to healthier and happier lives. Compass Arts' used Grow Grant funding for a Free International University, a place to reflect on society and help people realise their creative potential.

We also have more evidence from the third phase about generative interactions between MiH activities and higher levels (in terms of formal strategic authority) of the system, much of which is detailed in the "Learning for the system" section of this report. Evidence suggests more external acknowledgement of MiH as a programme that generates emergent learning that others can and should engage with rather than being viewed solely as a research project to determine the Council's long-term strategy for engaging communities. We have seen more interest in testing ABCD in voluntary and statutory organisations and more interaction between communities and services, demonstrating a growing capacity to reflect about how the wider system in East Sussex operates and could operate.

---

16 *This concept is Brazilian educator Paolo Freire's from* Pedagogy of the Oppressed, *published in 1970. He contends, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."*

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Above: Shinewater Gardens, Eastbourne

For whom MiH worked: those in need of safe, non-judgemental spaces

MiH participants were brought together by a mix of circumstances and needs – many for support not otherwise available or accessible. We have seen that the programme has at least partly met the intention (from the specification) to widen participation for "marginalised, minority and socially isolated groups" by meeting these groups where they were and fostering trust and relationships. This report presents learning about what has made people feel welcome and enabled the inclusion of diverse communities, as well as the structural and systemic barriers to their participation. Regarding these barriers, we have encountered some evidence of getting around them on a small scale, and we have also seen that a collectivisation of individual grievances has been powerful even if it has not yet produced structural or systemic change.

In the interim report, we noted that many community development programmes struggle to effectively support people who face systemic marginalisation (e.g. people of colour, people with disabilities or people from the LGBTQ community) without specific attention to overcoming barriers, including cultural literacy, access accommodations and remuneration. Many structural and

systemic barriers to participation were out of CDWs' and participants' control, though there are ways in which people have been supported to participate in spite of barriers they may have faced. In the third phase of the programme, we delivered a workshop with Grow Grant recipients where we explored how MiH includes (or is challenged to include) diverse communities. We also provided questions to CDWs and lead project facilitators to ask participants to understand what made them feel welcome.

The evidence from these engagement efforts built on insights from our interim report that reciprocal relationships were improving wellbeing and building community spirit[17], pointing to two things that have been prevalent across MiH: perceptions of non-judgement and (psychological) safety. These qualities have contributed to people's openness to trying new things and having new experiences. Welcoming spaces have made people

17 *The Royal Society for Public Health defines community spirit as "The feelings of connection and belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody." They suggest community spirit involves four key elements: a sense of belonging to a community, cohesiveness and inclusion, good relationships with other members of the community and collective action for the common good. (See* this source.*)*

feel valued and not critiqued or unsafe. Importantly, MiH activities have in most if not all cases been advertised in ways that have been informal and expansive, in contrast with being charity- or service-oriented. Many of the benefits afforded to people participating are thus not ones they necessarily 'came for' but ones which emerged through connection and even self-help.

For example, one project lead shared, "Lots of warm rooms were set up but advertised like it was for 'charity cases' – and they had more volunteers than participants. [One such space] is now a craft group and people are then warm because they're inside." Similarly, someone involved in Take Action Man, a men's mental health initiative offering the opportunity to get outside and active with other men, reported, "The activity really provided an environment where mental health did not feel front and centre, yet this allowed for conversations to happen and a 'no pressure' environment to open up about experiences."

> At Peacehaven Centre and Mosque, people find a space where they can connect in their own time, without pressure or expectation. Women and young people, in particular, have helped shape the centre into a place where they feel a real sense of belonging. As one participant shared, "I feel safe here, and it has become a home for our community." This ease in accessing the space and the environment that has been created is especially important for those Over time, these steady connections have made it easier for people to reach out, rely on one another, and feel less alone—especially for those from migrant and minority backgrounds who have struggled to find welcoming spaces elsewhere.

At the Eastbourne Scrap Store, a place to donate and buy cheap upcycled arts and crafts materials based inside a community centre, it was clear that one volunteer needed the foodbank next door, but they were "too proud to go", according to someone from the project. Eventually, another volunteer took them to use the community fridge, framing it as food that would otherwise be thrown away, in alignment with the purpose of the Scrap Store to which the volunteer was already connected.

The experience of fluidity – of going somewhere for one reason and finding something else there, and that something else presenting yet another opportunity – is a common thread across numerous MiH activities. At the Eastbourne Scrap Store, another person "broke down" during a workshop. The person who sat and talked with her shared, "She got herself back together and wrote us a thank you note. She came to do some crafting to take her mind off things, but said she got so much more than that."

Non-judgement

Within MiH, spaces for authentic and honest conversations have become possible. One of the principal things that stands out in reflections on what makes people feel welcome is a non-judgmental space, especially for people struggling with something that might otherwise be misunderstood or stigmatised. These are experiences that are in contrast with how people can sometimes be received when interacting with formal services. It is likely that the lesser hierarchy between CDWs/project leads and participants as compared with other environments of support and service provision has been facilitative of this.

Views of participants illustrate this. For instance, a participant of the Autism Café in Newhaven, a space for families with autistic

MAKING IT HAPPEN

children, commented: "It feels great not to be judged and have some understanding of needs… When I originally came to the youth centre with my daughter, we were for all intents and purposes turned away due to her SEN. There was nothing for her here. Hav[ing] a SEN child is incredibly stressful; we need the support and our children need a safe, welcoming, understanding place to socialise (without demands like in school)." Parents expressed similar views at the Youth Arts for Wellbeing sessions in Uckfield for children with social anxiety. A participant from the Breastfeeding Café, a group of breastfeeding parents, likewise felt comfortable to share personal experiences, knowing that she would "be faced with care and kindness rather than judgement or criticism."

The extent to which recommendations are followed and the learning enacted will in many ways constitute the legacy of MiH. Nonetheless, the programme has already left a legacy in cultivating resilience.

Some of what people have highlighted is an ability to exist in ways that social/cultural norms do not readily accept or endorse. For example, men being vulnerable and emotive amongst other men, as in the case of Take Action Man, which exists in some ways as an exception to the dominant culture. One of the group's participants said, "I feel safe sitting around the fire with these men. I don't know them well but it gives me an opportunity to talk about things I would never usually open up about, I can talk honestly and openly and I feel I am heard and supported without

judgement." Another shared, "The Men's Circle is a beautiful space, where I feel held and able to share with other men in an intimate setting and with a sense of safety and vulnerability I don't get to enjoy in daily life".

Above: Peacehaven Souper Social

At the Peacehaven Centre and Mosque, wellbeing is shaped by a culturally-responsive environment where people feel safe, valued, and recognised. Programmes build on cultural identity as a strength, creating spaces where confidence grows at an individual's own pace. For women, particularly from migrant backgrounds, who balance caregiving responsibilities and navigating a new and sometimes hostile environment, creative workshops, skill-sharing, and swimming sessions open up opportunities for new connections and personal growth. These relationships strengthen a sense of belonging, reinforcing that community resilience comes through the ties people build with one another, allowing confidence and connection to grow at their own pace.

Sense of safety

In addition to a perception of non-judgement, there is also a perception of safety, most often out of solidarity through shared experience. This sense of safety is indicative of the development of what we can call 'bonding' social capital (connection over shared experience).

For instance, a couple from Bourne This Way, an LGBTQ+ parent support group, remarked that the group "provides a break in our brains to reconnect… without an added pressure to explain ourselves and our family. I don't have to explain anything – I just am."Someone from the Breastfeeding Café echoed this in saying that "the other people are going through exactly what you're going through".

Yet, it is not always the case that this perception of safety comes from analogous experiences. For instance, the women

"One member now feels able to join the drama club at school whereas before they felt too shy and not part of the crowd."

Participant in Haven Young Creatives project

in Women of Vision, a peer support group of largely retired Bangladeshi and Caribbean women, have connected across cultures and ethnicities by listening to each other's life experiences. They have found themselves "pleasantly surprised by similarities" between their experiences. In the "Cultivating assets" section of this report, we expand on the identification of shared experience through bonding social capital and connect it to the development of collective voice for power and influence.

Above: Make Good Trouble young people's group.

Our recipe for creating a hospitable environment

Create reasons for people to gather

Talk to the neighbours

Make & create together

Extend a warm and open invitation

Share a meal

Discuss news and issues affecting our town

Build trust & connection

Collective problem solving

Feedback

Impact

Exhibitions & celebrations

Generate ideas

Co-create and work in Partnership

Share the learning

Empower people

Advocate for people & place

Celebrate the wins

People feel seen and heard

A sense of belonging and resilience

HOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT

Above: Hospitable Environment artwork
Opposite page: People's Knowledge Exchange © Phoebe Wingrove

ABCD in principle and practice

In the eyes of the evaluation, adopting and expanding ABCD in principle and practice in East Sussex means witnessing the four shifts from our analytical framework manifest across different levels. These shifts give clarity and language to what it means to embed ABCD, and distinguish it from methods like consultation as an approach that upholds the agency, creativity, and passions of people to make changes in their lives in a manner that is more open-ended and means- rather than ends-oriented.[18]

What ABCD is, and isn't

Crucially, this does not mean that ABCD is a singular thing. In fact, MiH has demonstrated that it means many things; people have played a variety of roles in the programme and in groups/on projects. ABCD isn't enacted in one way; rather, there are many ways one might uphold a set of core principles. These principles are commonly understood even if framed differently across practitioners. They include recognising each person as having a 'gift' to contribute (in a sense, already being self-actualised) along with treating people as actors with agency and interests and taking leadership from them. Of course, another core principle has to do with relationships building community.

This section details and amplifies the approaches that CDWs, lead project facilitators, voluntary organisation

"Everyone on every level is a valid member of society."
Participant in a sensemaking session

colleagues as well as councillors and statutory services have enacted throughout MiH. As set out in the interim report and in the introduction to this report, all lived experiences are valued and seen as potential assets in MiH, which allows space for recognition and solidarity – a distinct kind of engagement. As a participant in a sensemaking session put it, in this programme, "Everyone on every level is a valid member of society."

It's easy to talk about building on 'what's strong not what's wrong', listening, and allowing space for community leadership, and harder to do in practice. The way that ABCD has been practiced in MiH has reflected the four shifts: people and communities are treated as having strengths rather than deficits and trusted to take leadership together with others, they are heard and supported rather than prescribed

18 *We can think of ABCD as supportive of upper levels of the 'ladder of participation' created by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, pointing to a high degree of citizen power. At these levels of citizen control, delegated power, and partnership, stakeholders participate in setting up projects, holding responsibility, and being directly involved in decision-making, respectively.*

assumed solutions, and action is rooted at the local level rather than centralised. The role of CDWs and many lead project facilitators facilitated creative and collaborative approaches in this vein.

In MiH, people with lived experience of facing barriers have been the ones to identify and design activities to address them, redefining the narratives of their experiences.

Changing conceptions of oneself and place

The mindset shift of flipping deficits to strengths enables a reframing of perceptions of people and places, opening to the things that give people purpose and bring them joy rather than focusing only on what they need. By maintaining that everyone has gifts and motivations, ABCD approaches can dispute views that things 'are how they are', unchangeable by individuals or communities, particularly in the 'deprived' communities selected for MiH. Asset-based approaches can encourage seeing oneself and one's community as being capable and having value, and the possibilities for change.

This contrasts with predominant narratives and characterisations of such places and communities, which are often stigmatising and derogatory. At best, people don't necessarily see themselves and their places in the frames that authorities tend to use.

In MiH, people with lived experience of facing barriers have been the ones to identify and design activities to address them, redefining the narratives of their experiences. The impact of this is not to

be minimised, as it has been established that there is a negative loop in which powerlessness puts chronic stress on people, which over time is damaging to health. (*Rapid evidence review of community initiatives*, HM Government, 2022).

In the case of Shinewater Hub Gardens, persistent advocacy helped shift entrenched narratives of 'nothing changes here', gradually opening the space to wider community use. Through ongoing work by the CDW to embed ABCD and the engagement of residents over two years, things are starting to change. Residents reclaimed ownership of an underused space, shifting the perception from 'not for us' to 'ours to shape'. The CDW created a platform for discussion involving local residents, a local councillor and representative from the Food Partnership. Residents seemed happy to be acknowledged for their ideas about the space and experienced a boost in confidence and pride when their ideas were approved.

As one CDW put it, "Making it Happen has helped to develop and embed ABCD ways of working because it seeks to listen, empower and mobilise the people within a community who are directly affected by the issues that they wish to change/address without any preconceived ideas… [and] enables the organic development of a community and how it wishes to write its own narrative rather than being told who they are. In particular, stats, data (including economic, health, demographic etc.) typically focus on the negative aspects within a community… residents do not necessarily recognise their community when described in this way as there is a very strong sense of pride, innovation and can do attitude that is not evidenced."

"The walk last week had a positive effect on my mental health. It infiltrated my entire life and I got a bit closer to returning to swimming. One walk did all that. Got me thinking about my personal health."

Participant in Right Path hiking and camping group

In the case of Explore The Arch, the perception of the Four Courts estate community does not align with the reality of its capacity, agency, and resilience. Often seen from the outside as disengaged, residents have instead led projects that reflect their skills, histories and even ambitions both for themselves and their community. Through designing installations, leading performances and other behind the scenes work, they have claimed the space to define the narrative of how their community is perceived.

Through examples of how people have put ABCD principles into practice, it is clear how even interactions that seem inconsequential, or activities that do not scale, can nonetheless be significant and even life changing for an individual or a group – especially for how they can influence people's self-conception or conception of their community. Feedback from a participant in Right Path – a hiking and camping group for all ages and walks of life – illustrates this: "The walk last week had a positive effect on my mental health. It infiltrated my entire life and I got a bit closer to returning to swimming. One walk did all that. Got me thinking about my personal health."

ABCD practice in MiH

Leading by stepping back

A key feature of the practice of ABCD in MiH has been described by CDWs and system stakeholders as 'leading by stepping back'. People have an active role in deciding about the activities they are part of but CDWs and lead project facilitators play an invaluable role in making it possible for people to do that in ways that leave them feeling empowered and not discouraged.

We have observed, particularly in the third and final phase of the evaluation, that CDWs have taken an elastic approach and listened empathetically to allow space for what people want for themselves to emerge and to draw attention to what the 'glue' is that connects people. This has looked like a lightly facilitative way of holding a group, in which they take time to get to know people by being a listening ear and then empowering people to exercise strengths that already exist.

It has also taken shape as activities that have been tracked as "meaningful connections" such as signposting, making introductions and problem-solving. As we wrote in the interim report, turning good ideas and community passion into groups and projects doesn't happen by itself as

Support communities to take a lead

MAKING IT HAPPEN

these need to be nurtured and developed. One CDW framed their role as operating from a "positive, solution-focused position, but always acknowledg[ing] and allow[ing] space for the venting of frustrations, upsets, and set-backs."

There has been a role for CDWs throughout the whole process for a group, from funding to enabling and offering constructive feedback. It is a role that has required letting go of control but also being there for people should they need the support. CDWs have made people aware of potential challenges that they have seen coming without putting the brakes on and offered to help them unblock roadblocks. The presence of CDWs in conflictual discussions between groups and venues or other stakeholders in many instances mitigated against damage and divisiveness, often making projects stronger. For example, a CDW has been supporting residents in HASHTA, a tenants' association within Southern Housing group properties in Hastings, who have a goal to represent tenants collectively in liaison with Southern Housing. Striking a balance between building capability of others and playing this mediator role is something they have intentionally navigated.

Lead project facilitators have also demonstrated this form of leadership,

Above: Explore The Arch group outing

opening up space for participants to feel a sense of shared ownership over activities. Compass Arts, for example, hosts activities with anyone vulnerable to social isolation, lived trauma, mental illness and hidden disabilities that are co-created based on what people are interested in.

▶ *Video link*

At Explore The Arch, participants directed the pace and conversations during facilitated nature and heritage trips, shifting the programme from a prescriptive model to a participant-led experience. The trips were framed as spaces for exploration rather than instruction, validating participants' existing knowledge rather than positioning external facilitators as experts. Many participants already had deep knowledge of the natural world and local history, and the programme provided a structure for them to reconnect with and share that knowledge.

At Peacehaven Centre and Mosque, decisions have always been shaped by those who use the space. Even after becoming a registered charity, the centre remained flexible, with activities reflecting the needs of the community rather than external agendas. Women's groups created their own spaces for skill-sharing, wellbeing, and social connection, from sewing circles to swimming sessions. "We set it up ourselves, so we know it works for us," one participant shared. These resident-led initiatives ensured the centre became a trusted space, where people felt ownership over what happened within its walls.

Both of the examples above demonstrate how, when communities are supported in setting their own direction, projects go beyond just surviving their immediate challenges through firefighting (an important skill to have in complex settings like this) but also strengthen local leadership and trust over time.

"I don't have to explain anything — I just am."
Participant from Bourne This Way

Enabling confidence to grow

A notable extension of 'leading by stepping back' as described above is increased confidence. One CDW recounted, "I believe that by showing groups and individuals 'trust', we enabled the positive effect that MiH has on participants' confidence and self-esteem". For example, Haven Young Creatives, a youth-led theatre company involving those with limited access to the arts, has been a space of strengthened confidence; "one member now feels able to join the drama club at school whereas before they felt too shy and not part of the crowd."

Growth in confidence can happen for anyone involved and in unexpected ways, as in the discoveries of untapped assets within themselves and each other, building their sense of agency. These discoveries constitute affirmations of the value of people's contributions to the collective and as such often beget new leaders from within the community of participants. This can produce more distributed leadership in a group and contribute to the group's sustainability, or have even more far reaching effects.

At Explore The Arch, older residents rediscovered confidence in their own knowledge of nature and heritage, gradually becoming more comfortable sharing their stories. As one participant reflected, "I didn't think my memories mattered, but now I see they're part of something bigger." Through mentoring younger facilitators, they shifted from quiet participants to active contributors, reinforcing their sense of purpose. With each conversation, their role in shaping community narratives became clearer, strengthening their belief in the value of their experiences and their ability to lead.

In the case of Shinewater Hub Gardens, the space grew through the efforts of residents who shaped it by reclaiming and activating an underused space. With the support of CDWs, local people identified priorities – whether food growing, rewilding, or creating a welcoming community space – and had the trust and encouragement to take the lead. Some stepped into advocacy roles, negotiating with trustees and local authorities to secure long-term access. "I wouldn't have known where to start, but having someone there to back us made all the difference," one resident reflected. Through hands-on involvement in gardening, site maintenance, and decision-making, participants gained the confidence to sustain the work themselves, reinforcing their sense of ownership and leadership.

Evidence also points to examples in which people are providing peer mentorship and intergenerational mentorship, including on a long-term basis in some cases. Whether through mentorship or

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Above: Big Sparks event

otherwise, consistency of participation can build confidence over time as returning repeatedly and doing new things, as well as witnessing others do new things, can chip away at apprehensiveness and present more opportunities to expand one's capabilities.

At Explore The Arch, people built confidence through returning, sharing, and shaping the space over time. Some participants were hesitant at first, but as they kept coming back, they began to see themselves as part of something bigger. In the Four Courts Connect project, one participant reflected, "There's things that you do that you wouldn't just dream of doing on your own…but you do them in a group," highlighting how steady involvement made new experiences feel possible. Another described how simply showing up, week after week, created a deeper sense of connection: "Confidence comes from persistence and being present".

In the case of Bexhill Men's Shed, many eased into participation at their own pace, with informal conversations and small tasks serving as early entry points. Men who initially observed from the sidelines began showing up regularly, gradually taking on more active roles. One member, who had suffered a stroke, first attended without expecting to contribute due to some constraints but soon found a way to engage through CAD design, creating digital blueprints for Shed projects, and slowly gained confidence in being able to contribute in his own way. His wife reflected on the change, noting that he "spends all week planning and talking about his next project". This steady involvement highlighted how long-term participation fosters confidence, purpose, and social bonds.

Next generation of practitioners

There are many more examples from the third phase of the programme of how MiH is effectively modelling the different kind of relationship a service and its staff could have with the people it supports through adopting ABCD principles. There are also more examples of formal groups and services making a more proactive effort to connect with MiH groups and activities beyond referral pathways in order to learn from their experiences and build understanding of the community and place. But this does not negate the indispensable role of CDWs nor completely answer the question of who the next generation of practitioners will be and how they will become acquainted with the practice.

At Explore The Arch, Community Development Workers (CDWs) have been instrumental in building trust between grassroots groups and formal institutions, ensuring that community voices shape decision-making. Their support has helped sustain long-term relationships, making it easier for people to access resources, share knowledge, and lead their own initiatives. But the future of this role is uncertain. As one participant reflected, "Without them, we wouldn't even know where to start." These connections remain important.

In the interim report, we suggested that building on existing offers like ABCD training could encourage people to 're-train' their default modes of operating. We suggested that consistency of practice (refreshing and returning to ABCD principles) across CDWs was key. There were some examples in the past year of gatherings to stimulate learning and adoption of ABCD but, as one MiH team member noted, "A huge challenge was the lack of resource for training and development. We had to make do and mend and couldn't afford to rerun the programme so new recruits just had to 'jump on'. This was really tough. But I also think we have been incredibly lucky in the team which has evolved."

A key question for the continuation of ABCD practice has to do with training and capability-building: who will future generations of practitioners be and who will equip them for this work? How will their lived experiences be reflected in the work? One sensemaking session participant proposed, "Communities should get to rummage in the toolbox of skills the CDW has. Councillors as well." We also suggested in the interim report that services and projects need to be operating from a strengths-based perspective alongside MiH for broader impact. An investment in opportunities for people to learn ABCD is a part of making this possible.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

"I feel to have engaged much more with the local community through participation in the collective, and it has provided a safe and vibrant environment to connect with other locally based people with a shared love of traditional folk music."

Member of Dockside Barrel Scrapers
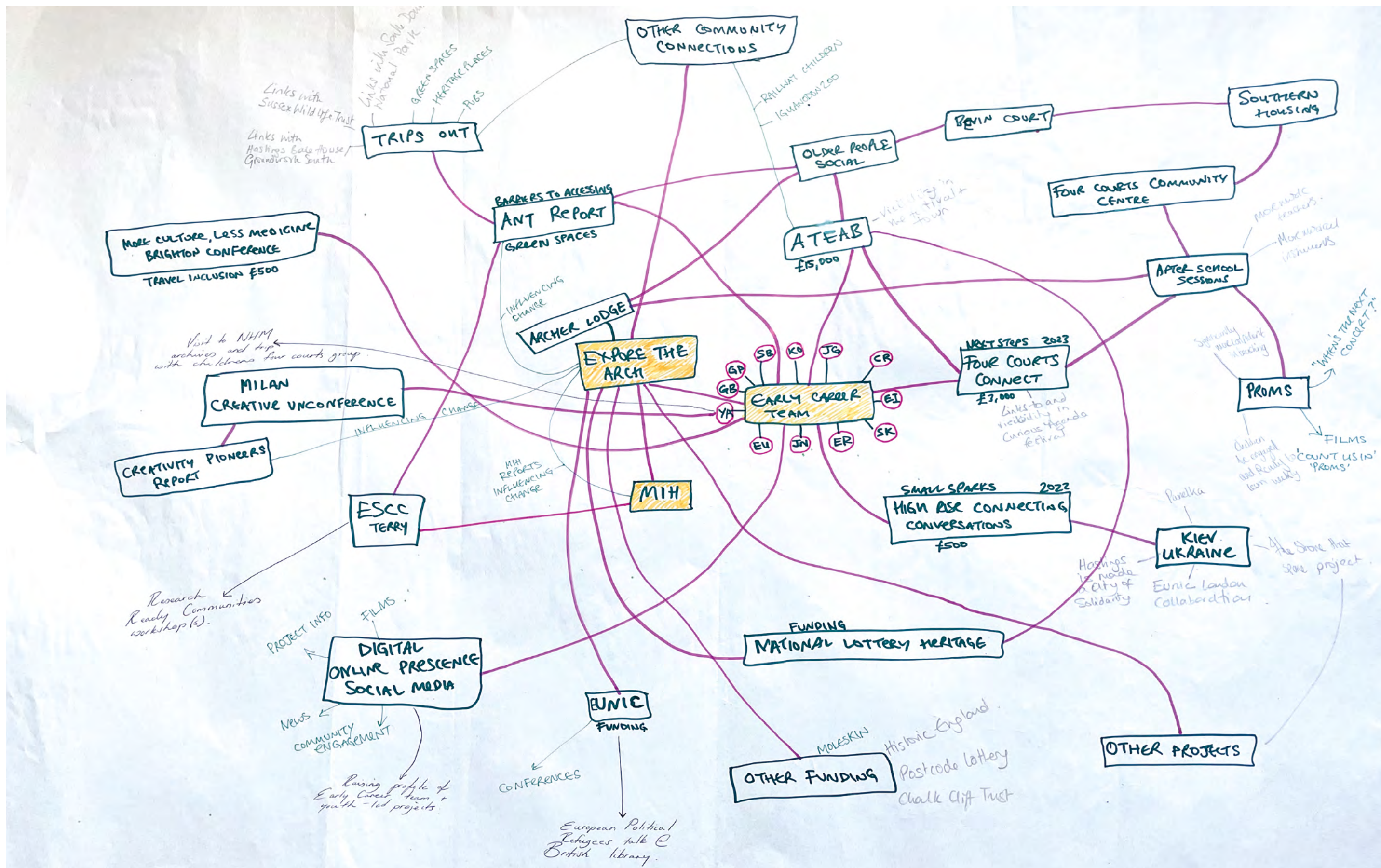
Cultivating assets

MiH is an asset-based programme. The field of ABCD typically understands assets to include individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, and connections. For the sake of this report, we characterise assets developed through MiH as principally social and physical. The physical includes things like land, buildings and equipment. The social includes people's talents, skills and passions, as well as collective efficacy; community associations and connections; and heritage, stories and culture. Critically, the physical and social intertwine at community infrastructure like gardens, schools and community centres (some of which are institutions and others more informal places of gathering).

We developed the Four Shifts framework to include levels, suggesting that a shift can take effect at different scales. This section is organised in accordance with the levels of the Four Shifts framework to track the development of assets through MiH at different scales, illustrated in Figure A on page 13. This graphic is repeated throughout the section with a different level highlighted to assist with navigating the report. This application of the framework allows for the connection between shifts and assets through the common language of levels. In fact, many of the indicators developed as part of the framework are assets themselves and noted in this section – for instance, "changes in the diversity and

typology of social networks and connections as community members connect and support one-another".

The MiH programme has been delivered in a set of areas within East Sussex chosen because of opportunities to develop assets, opportunities to build on existing strengths in order to improve health and wellbeing. The Area Snapshots in the Appendix illustrate the research behind these choices and characteristics of the areas. Through these Snapshots and mapping efforts at the start of the programme, there developed an understanding by CDWs and their organisations of the assets and challenges in the places to begin with. Area Snapshots were then updated to reflect changes since MiH. This evaluation bolsters the contents of those updated Snapshots and tells more of the stories behind the changes.

Cultural assets
Services and beyond
People and services
Between people
Within a person

Above: Dockside Barrel Scrapers, Newhaven-based folk band
Opposite: Asset-mapping at Newhaven Fish Festival

Above: Explore The Arch ripple effect chart

MAKING IT HAPPEN

> *"It made me realise this is where my passion is and is the direction I want my career to go in the future,"*

Facilitator of Crafty Trees project

Within a person

The first level of the framework is within a person. The asset-based way of working detailed in the previous section creates environments in which people are supported to do things, often new things, starting with identifying and building on their talents, skills and passions and any social networks. This contributes to growth in confidence, clarified passions and purpose and empowerment.

Clarified purpose

For some people involved in MiH, increased confidence has empowered them to make deeper changes in their lives. For example, the facilitator of Crafty Trees, which has delivered craft sessions with MiH support, gained experience that contributed to her landing two paid jobs, which she says wouldn't have happened without MiH. Feeling valued and respected in these positions has given her renewed hope and confidence after 13 years out of the workforce. Likewise, taking on the project of Raise Your Voice, a podcast focused on mental health, has been life changing for the facilitator. "It made me realise this is where my passion is and is the direction I want my career to go in the future," she said.

Learning skills

The skills and crafts that people have built through MiH activities include ones they can use ubiquitously, as in young people from Youth Voice – who enable young people

living within Willingdon Trees to have a voice on the issues that matter to them – to "talk to different types of people". The same goes for the provision of holistic English skills training by Diversity Resource International (DRI), a non-profit supporting new migrants. People have also built skills that they can put to use under specific circumstances such as crocheting or carpentry.

In Explore The Arch, the Early Careers team's leadership has reshaped their mental health and social networks, changed their perceptions of their power and neighbourhood and reinforced their agency. One of the team who participated in an international conference through their work with Explore The Arch reflected, "It was a privilege to be supported and encouraged to take on this incredible journey, to network with a global cohort of creative people to further my knowledge of not only personal interests and avenues, but also expanding my understandings of ideas and structures that could benefit the communities we work with in Hastings and St Leonards".

Building capabilities in these contexts can be the beginning of a longer learning journey. What keeps people on that journey is an environment of safety, non-judgement and belonging, as discussed in the previous section. Learning a skill has in many cases

Above: Artwork by a Compass Arts participant

been what has brought people through the door of a MiH group or project, and what keeps them there is the welcoming environment and community spirit.

At Bexhill Men's Shed, practical skills like woodworking and repairs are what initially brings people in. Learning a craft helped the men in this group have a new sense of purpose, and in the process, they found themselves part of something bigger – a space where knowledge is shared, where friendships are formed, and slowly there is an embracement of this mutual support. "You come for the tools, but you stay for the people," someone shared. The Shed's hands-on approach has made participation easy and accessible, and what emerges over time is a strong network of support, reflecting one of the cores of ABCD way of working where relationships, and shared experiences become the foundation for effective change.

Person to person: individuals and individuals

There are two kinds of person-to-person connections under the Four Shifts framework: those between individuals and those between collectives. Between individuals, MiH has influenced the building of assets through the identification of shared experiences as well as connection across differences and in the exchanging of skills.

Identification of shared experience

Peer-to-peer connection creates opportunities for people to articulate their experiences and recognise their shared struggles and desires. In this spirit, someone from the Breastfeeding Café declared that being part of the group "makes me want to not only continue breastfeeding but to help others in their journeys". This type of connection through shared experience can be understood as an expression of bonding social capital, where strong ties are built between people who have things in common.

Identification of experience is an important step towards being able to build upon that experience and shape services and support, or exercise voice and participation in other arenas civically, such as in interactions with formal services or housing associations. This reiterates the potential of ABCD to shift stigmatising narratives in the sense that people come to understand their struggles are not theirs to be ashamed of but ones that many people face.

Connections that exist through MiH in this community didn't exist previously, partly due to the income gap between people who grew up in the area and those now moving there.

Connection across difference

Although the type of identification of shared experience characteristic of bonding social capital described above was most common across MiH activities, there were some examples in which connection in a heterogenous group resulted in understanding and belonging. We have seen more evidence of connections across differences, some of which we have already described, such as Peacehaven Centre and Mosque to Women of Vision.

Another illustration of connection across difference is Camber Book Stop, which had small beginnings as a project to create a community 'book stop' where people could donate, borrow, share and return books. A book group grew out of the book stop, and from that an idea for a photography project was born to encourage connection during a Covid-19 lockdown. This in turn evolved into a calendar of photographs and a newsletter. The lead project facilitator described how the photography project in particular captured the imaginations of both longer term residents and newcomers. A newer resident with graphic design skills began to support the calendar and newsletter. Connections that exist through MiH in this community didn't exist previously, partly due to the income gap between people who grew up in the area and those now moving there. Local councillors have become involved, and one of the active members of the group even stood for council.

In the interim report, we suggested exploring further opportunities to broaden social networks and connections across demographic differences as well as intergenerationally – better engaging with those less heard and underrepresented in services. As indicated above, there are more examples of connections across differences, though they are still in the minority of examples.

Skill-sharing

We have seen many more examples in the third phase of how improvement in capacity and capability is supporting some people to build transferable skills. Groups have done this whilst accommodating people of varying abilities and backgrounds, utilising the talents of the group as a whole, and making best use of what people come to the group with (largely in terms of materials) and filling gaps.

> At Bexhill Men's Shed, skills moved in all directions. Some members brought years of experience in woodworking and repair, while others introduced digital design or different ways of approaching a project. "Everyone brings something to the table," somebody shared with their CDW. Teaching happened informally – over a shared task, through conversation, or by watching someone else work. There was no set way to participate, which made space for people of all backgrounds and abilities to contribute in their own way.

Dockside Barrel Scrapers, which started as the mixed ability, multi-instrumental Newhaven Folk School, grew into a performing band and platform for not only developing musically but connecting with each other and others in the community, including through their gigs at local pubs from which they have raised money for the local food bank. The lead project facilitator recounted, "What I have seen happen is quite incredible. It has become a community of skill sharers and enablers, organisers and encouragers, makers and demonstrators of their outside interests and personal projects often utilising the talents of the group as a whole."

Likewise, DRI supports people to learn English as a second language but additional support from CDWs helped initiate relationships with other local assets resulting in the publication of Gather 2 Cook, collection of authentic, home-cooked international recipes from communities across East Sussex. Learners from different ESOL classes in Uckfield and the Havens wrote their favourite recipes which were collated and printed in the book. Links were made with the Hillcrest Centre, the Lewes District Food Partnership and Community Supermarkets to grow awareness of the recipe book and display them. This spurred ideas by learners for a longer-term plan of running an international café. A CDW remarked, "It was lovely to see how they could show the wider community their skills and talents as sometimes the labels of refugees and asylum seekers denies people of the range of experience, knowledge and skills they have."

▶ *Video link*

New skills have proved useful not just for individuals but for their neighbours by being put to use to meet needs in the broader community. In describing the potential benefits of skill-sharing, one CDW expressed, "The work we have been able to do with MiH has created so many groups and projects that support their local communities and while we are aware that some will not be sustainable long term,

"We've been able to recognise where other asset-based projects are and cross-pollinate."
Eastbourne Scrapstore member

many will still be going in years to come, or a development of it. Even for one-off events, it has provided the skills and knowledge that can be used in the future or shared through peer support."

> When a local café for Ukrainian refugees was being set up, members of the Bexhill Men's Shed got involved by sourcing materials, putting in the time, and building it at a much lower cost than if it had been outsourced. The same approach helped a local school, where donated timber (at the shed) was turned into play equipment. By using what was available and sharing their skills, they made sure these spaces could be created in a way that was both affordable and useful to those in their own community and in this case, even beyond.

> In Shinewater Hub Gardens, people brought what they knew and picked up new skills along the way. Some had experience negotiating with local authorities, while others knew how to work the land or shared stories about the site's history. One of the residents mentioned how a fellow participant "knew about the flooding issues because of how the land was used years ago, which really helped us figure out where to put things." This skill sharing has shaped decisions affecting the community, and as people have worked together and exchanged knowledge – new ideas have emerged to better meet their needs.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

A lot of the reciprocal teaching of skills as part of MiH has involved intergenerational connections. For example, Let's Get Fishing works to support young people to learn how to fish. These kinds of interactions have resulted in knowledge exchange with added benefits for older people in feeling a renewed sense of purpose from being able to pass on wisdom and learning to young people, and benefits for young people in having a sense of generational continuity and mentorship.

▶ *Video link*

In Selby Meadows, the older residents passed down their knowledge of local wildlife and conservation, while the younger participants introduced newer age ideas such as using digital tools to support environmental learning, collectively enhancing everyone's knowledge. "One of the kids showed me how to use the ID app to figure out the trees around us," one of the volunteers mentioned. Another similarly said, "I didn't know much about digital stuff, but now I can turn my ideas into something real". The forest school-style sessions, interactive signage, and hands-on activities like the mud kitchen have made it easy for people of different ages to contribute what they know.

"It has provided a safe and vibrant environment to connect with other locally based people with a shared love of traditional folk music."

Member of the Dockside Barrel Scrapers band

In the case of Bexhill Men's Shed something of a very similar nature happened, where older members passed on woodworking and craftsmanship skills, while the younger participants introduced digital design tools. These exchanges were not only about skill-building – it strengthened relationships, made space for mentorship, helped men find purpose beyond their work or retirement.

Cultural assets
Services and beyond
People and services
Between people
Within a person

Person to person: collectives of people

Collectives of people have come together to pool capacity for the benefit of a shared interest or around an issue. They have also sought or established connections for the sake of expanding their reach and impact, or for reciprocal/mutual support. And, this is the level at which we most readily see a 'spilling over' of effects beyond the boundaries of the programme. Much of the activity at this level has applications for civic participation. In all cases, there is an expansion and diversification of social networks at play and exchanges taking place – exchanges not only of learning but also other resources.

Bridging between groups

Sometimes, one social group and another began to collaborate (each having built bonding social capital), an expression of bridging social capital, where connections are built across heterogeneous social groups. This happened organically or at times more deliberately, as in the case of Peacehaven Carers Wellbeing, which "engaged with friends and the wider community more" upon changing to "an outward thinking group not an inwards closed off group" – effectively moving from bonding to bridging. Without bridging, there can be an exclusion of those who do not conform to the group whereas working to advance bridging social capital has the potential to minimise disparities in access and power within a community.

Bexhill Men's Shed were able to make hobby horses for the Bexhill Horse Show's hobby horse event. The Men's Shed had made Naturally Crafted (who MiH had worked with several years ago) a window display at Christmas time, so through their connection, Naturally Crafted became involved to decorate the hobby horse heads. The Men's Shed also had a stand at the Bexhill Horse Show and were able to sell items as well as loan hobby horses to the community. The Horse Show made more money than anticipated and donated £1000 of it to the Bexhill Men's Shed.

Green Man, which connects men with nature and their own nature to seed a culture of "mature masculinity" and address some of the big issues for men in Hastings, has a number of community partners. They have built raised beds and biodigesters at Art in the Park, the Men's Shed, and Woody Wood Garden. Dockside Barrel Scrapers has also sought connections with a variety of other groups, and participants have greatly valued these connections and their increased awareness of other community projects and activities as a result alongside the learning of songs. One commented: "I feel to have engaged much more with the

local community through participation in the collective, and it has provided a safe and vibrant environment to connect with other locally based people with a shared love of traditional folk music." Another said, "Being a part of the group has also made me more aware of the many other community projects and activities in the area."

▶ *Video link* @ **14 minutes 20 seconds**

Converging for a shared purpose

When groups of people have come together, they have often done so for the sake of a shared interest, pooling their capacity, and in the process, growing the number of people benefitting from their activities. For example, in Hollington, Craig's Cabin (a small group of community volunteers that seeks to promote positive wellbeing through outdoor activities) and Marline Court Community Garden volunteers connected around the community garden. Marline Garden needed more people to work in the garden and Craig's Cabin wanted to help. The CDW reported that "both groups are open to further training and collaboration, and the confidence and social contacts have improved for individuals within both groups."

▶ *Video link*

Selby Meadows has thrived for over a decade through the commitment of local volunteers, who have adapted to challenges like shifting participation and environmental changes. When volunteer numbers fluctuated, the group partnered with the Uckfield Volunteer Centre to bring in new members, ensuring the space remained cared for. "We've always found ways to keep going, even when things got difficult," one volunteer shared. These efforts strengthened both the Meadow's sustainability and the confidence of those leading it.

At Shinewater Hub Gardens, gardening became the entry point for building relationships across different social groups – residents, local organisations, and decision-makers. What started as informal gardening sessions naturally expanded into wider conversations, connecting people who might not have otherwise crossed paths. Residents who had long felt unheard found new ways to engage with local trustees, environmental groups, and service providers, to shape decisions that directly impacted their community. The Shinewater Partnership Meeting became an important space of convergence, bringing together schools, police, and community leaders, ensuring that residents – regardless of background – had a voice in shaping the space. A participant reflected, "Before, it felt like decisions were made about us, not with us. Now, we're part of the conversation."

CDWs have been key nodes in these broadened networks having identified opportunities for connections between different groups or projects and where people needed support. With CDW support, MiH has instigated change not just in the number of connections people have but in the type and depth. For example, when the woods where Project Rewild held forest school activities was to be sold, which risked everything for them, they were able to draw on support through MiH contacts for a crowdfunding initiative. The woods were sold to another buyer but there is a possibility the group may be able to carry on using the woods and the group had much appreciation for the support offered via MiH.

Learning from and with each other

There has been 'permission' through MiH to visit and seek advice from different groups and projects to collaborate and work alongside each other, and the third phase of the programme brought more evidence of different groups and projects coming together to learn and take action, expressing collective purpose and ambition. In other words, people have been engaging with others in their community on issues that are important to them. Community groups have also led learning to embed ABCD locally in more informal ways that treat knowledge as a process of collective inquiry.

For example, Green Room has promoted trust and collaboration across sectors like the VCSE, energy, public health, and climate action. Community Table events have allowed MiH projects in Eastbourne to connect, network, learn, exchange ideas, share their successes and challenges and leave a legacy of collaboration among local groups. The Hospitable Environment People's Knowledge Exchange came about to highlight the contributions of grassroots community organisations, create conversations across sectors, encourage new collaborations and to advocate for community voices in shaping future town planning and public services.

The interim report reported that MiH was already achieving its ambition of stimulating local neighbourhood and community-specific activity – activity that, rather than using a template, is particular to and emerging from the communities where they are based. We suggested it could be possible to explore more connections and collaborations between similar groups to pool resources and learn from one another but in a way that maintained their individuality and authenticity and left space for them to diverge in how they develop. Groups have already done some of this.

There is evidence from the third phase of cross-pollination, linking across, and sharing of resources and examples like the visit by the Eastbourne Scrap Store to the Hastings Library of Things. Eastbourne Scrap Store is a group whose lead volunteers have lived experience of social isolation and loneliness, physical health challenges and lack of self esteem, who have found crafting a valuable way to rebuild social connections. Visiting the Library of Things in Hastings was transformational for them: "We walked in and we thought – this is what we want," they recounted. They also have links to the community fridge and local projects and services as well as other local groups such as Family Fun Gatherers. One lead project facilitator commented, "We've been able to recognise where other asset-based projects are and cross-pollinate."

We have seen in the third phase that the learning from community groups and networks extends to building shared understanding of what is going on in their place, how to make things happen there and what needs to change. They do their own community storytelling, deciding what's important rather than someone administering a service doing that for them. This means the learning stays within communities and informs their actions in a circular way rather than it being extracted to inform prescribed solutions.

"It has become a community of skill sharers and enablers, organisers and encouragers and demonstrators... often utilising the talents of the group as a whole."

Lead facilitator for Dockside Barrel Scrapers band

"We've been able to recognise where other asset–based projects are and cross–pollinate."

Lead project facilitator

Residents involved in Shinewater Hub Gardens exchanged knowledge on advocacy, site maintenance, and environmental management, gaining them new skills as well as finding value in their existing knowledge. As people began to slowly build confidence in their own expertise, external groups like the Blue Heart Project (funded by ESCC) as well as local schools began engaging with the group, not as experts coming in with ready-made solutions, but instead as collaborators to work alongside the community's existing knowledge. Over time, these relationships have deepened, with residents applying what they learned to shape decisions about the space and advocate for their own local priorities.

Some networks have explicitly come together as groupings of projects supported through MiH to continue learning together after the programme's conclusion. Among these is Blueprint to Beyond, a group of projects in Hastings that work locally to improve health and wellbeing developing a learning community[19] to explore where and how asset-based approaches can be strengthened, blending experiential learning with reflective practice.

---

19 *As defined by Peter Senge, a learning community is a place where people expand their capacity to create the results they desire, nurture new and expansive patterns of thinking and set collective aspirations free.*

Additionally, Rother Art and Creative Network held an initial event in November 2024 linking local creative projects together to form a network, sharing experiences, stories and local knowledge, identifying priorities for action, exploring the appetite for continuing to learn together and creating a diorama of community collaboration. A community picnic event at Rye Community Garden gathered groups from eastern Rother and beyond, building on some of the relationships that came about through MiH, and Growing Together has developed as an informal umbrella network of 30+ growers to enable closer collaboration, many of whom are recipients of support and/or funding from MiH.

"[There's a] knock-on effect from supporting a community group a few years ago and seeing the connections and growth still continuing now,"
Community Development Worker

The purpose of groups has evolved over time and, in some cases, people who initially made connections through one group or activity have gone on to set up new initiatives.

Spillover beyond MiH

We have also seen that relationships extend beyond the organised events or meet-ups related to a project and 'spillover' into conversations and connections outside of MiH. For example, Social Sundays craft and chat drop-in sessions have led to connections that extend beyond the scope of the MiH-funded activity: "friendships have grown between people who have been attending and some people meet up outside of the sessions".

Being part of one group or activity can also be a gateway to getting involved in

Above: Wave Arts diorama

Above: Artwork by a Compass Arts participant

other things and making more connections. For example, the POP Group has seen an indication that "once people realised what was going on at the centre [and threats of the community centre's closure] they actually wanted to attend even more and support it".

The purpose of groups has evolved over time and, in some cases, people who initially made connections through one group or activity have gone on to set up new initiatives. A baby clothing swap idea within Pebsham Little Bees Toddler Group appeared to be better positioned to succeed due to another group's previous success with boosting an underused toddler group some years back: "[There's a] knock-on effect from supporting a community group a few years ago and seeing the connections and growth still continuing now," a CDW observed.

"Once people realised what was going on at the centre they wanted to attend more."
POP group participant

Between people and services

Much of the activity at this level is indicative of linking social capital, where community groups/organisations link to institutions with greater formal power. (Power is a more notable feature of the dynamic.) This is the level at which CDWs and lead project facilitators seek to make links between community groups/initiatives and local authorities, public and voluntary service organisations like Family Hubs and Amaze, housing associations, schools, GPs etc. Within MiH, this linking has primarily been in service of communities gaining access to physical assets but also to open doors for other support. This is also where

groups (even with CDW help) come up against bigger barriers.

Neighbourhood Sparks events were illustrative of the kinds of forums that have existed for linking community members and system stakeholders. These were planned and delivered with local residents to share learning, make connections and decisions about budgets for local community projects and welcome decision-makers in a listening capacity. Most of the time, however, CDWs and lead project facilitators worked in a more independent way to forge links.

Accessing spaces

Beyond gaining access to services and resources, having a physical space to gather is a crucial part of bringing communities together. But this is often where power dynamics surface between residents and the institutions that govern these spaces. The work of accessing spaces for gathering has been a recurring challenge over both phases

of the programme, with CDWs playing a crucial role in linking these two parts of the system together.

Challenges in accessing spaces that have been underutilised within communities can be for various reasons, but one crucial theme that we have come across is bureaucratic processes. At Wadhurst Close in Eastbourne, for example, land that the community sought to use belonged to the council, meaning residents couldn't proceed without permissions. Navigating the perceived bureaucracy of accessing council-owned land was difficult. The CDW played a key role in helping to identify the right people to speak to within the council (housing services), broker the relationships that would ensure access to the space without overburdening residents, and lay groundwork so that the residents would have an established contact even beyond this particular space or project.

Challenges in accessing spaces that have been underutilised within communities can be for various reasons, but one crucial theme

Above: Polegate Sparks, Wealden

When it comes to physical assets, the interim report documented MiH projects and activities unlocking unused or underused local community assets and resources, "bringing them back into use or creating more spaces for connection and community activity which have been overlooked or are inaccessible or inefficient for formal services operating at a wider geographical footprint." We've continued to see how important accessible, shared spaces are for communities to connect and build capacity and agency.

We also indicated that investing in community spaces is a key enabler of community engagement and action, that increasing access to spaces and investing in them is a key prerequisite for action. We did not see much of any of this in the third phase of the programme, though there are more collaborative relationships with local councillors and others leading to local assets being made available for community use, but navigating formal/statutory service structures to make truly collaborative connections has proven difficult.

that we have come across is bureaucratic processes. At Wadhurst Close in Eastbourne, for example, land that the community sought to use belonged to the council, meaning residents couldn't proceed without permissions. Navigating the perceived bureaucracy of accessing council-owned land was difficult. The CDW played a key role in helping to identify the right people to speak to within the council (housing services), broker the relationships that would ensure access to the space without overburdening residents, and lay groundwork so that the residents would have an established contact even beyond this particular space or project.

Activating spaces

It is impractical to facilitate the use of a physical asset and expect magic to happen; a community has to care for it, and even informal spaces can become hotspots if they are activated as such. MiH has evinced a strong relationship between physical and social assets; the social fabric of a community impacts on people's efforts

to revitalise or transform a physical asset, and social connections also arise from having access to a physical asset as a meeting place. In other words, community infrastructure supports social capital development either directly ("through how the physical infrastructure is purposefully used for bringing people together") or indirectly ("by providing the infrastructure to enable individuals within a community to connect together").

MiH has evinced a strong relationship between physical and social assets; the social fabric of a community impacts on people's efforts to revitalise or transform a physical asset, and social connections also arise from having access to a physical asset as a meeting place.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

"Before, it felt like decisions were made about us, not with us. Now, we're part of the conversation."

Shinewater Hub Gardens volunteer

Bexhill Men's Shed came to have a physical space at a local college thanks to an introduction of a Shed member by a CDW to someone from the college at an event. This connection exempts the Shed from being at the whims of the real estate market given that the college is more insulated from fluctuations in the market. The connection to the college also presented an opportunity for intergenerational knowledge-exchange and possible volunteering recruitment. The opening of the Shed was collaboratively hosted by Shed participants and college students.

At Peacehaven Centre and Mosque, the space has become what people need it to be. Women gather for sewing circles, swimming sessions, and parenting workshops – not as part of a set program, but because these were the things that made sense to them. Week by week, they have come to know each other through swapping skills and stories. Some come for the activities, and others just for some company. Over time, the centre has become a place where people turn to when they need support, where someone always has time to listen.

Spaces can be more than meets the eye, or mean something to a community that is less perceptible to someone outside of it. Unlikely spaces can become hotspots for connection, and spaces that may seem by some not to have much going on can be very important.

The Waving Off Party at Four Courts started with just a few people gathering in an informal space for a chat. What had been an ordinary street corner for the most part is now a hotspot to help connect people to the group. This space is being carried on by those who keep visiting this spot for the familiarity, and this has helped in activating this physical space that was not considered as a particularly transformative space before. However, not every space finds that kind of purpose. The 1066 Country Path, despite the improvements, has continued to be a place that people pass through. Someone mentioned, "It's nice, but no one really goes there". Without the pull of community shaping how a space is used or the input of space usage from the community, even well-planned projects can miss what makes a place feel like it belongs to people.

The development of these assets and social capital translates to more activities being based where communities want and need them through use of local spaces, and more voice as to what they look like and how they work. The investment through MiH in these assets has potential to bear fruit beyond the length of the programme; all of this constitutes the social and physical infrastructure (and the social-physical infrastructure) that can support communities to engage, influence and cohere.

Developments of assets at the last level of the Four Shifts framework, that of 'between services and beyond' i.e. institutions and the wider system, is covered in the section of this report about learning for the system. Even at these three levels, the outcome of activity across the programme is significant in terms of different kinds of assets and social capital in East Sussex.

Barriers to developing and utilising assets

The announcement of a £1.5 billion investment by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in places "most left behind", among them Bexhill-on-Sea, Eastbourne, and Hastings, which have all been part of MiH, is a notable development since the start of the MiH programme. It suggests that investment in neighbourhoods is about "more than just physical infrastructure, but also about repairing fractured communities, bringing people back together and ensuring people see a visible improvement in their communities".

The report Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods notes: "We know that many of the barriers in resolving the big policy challenges of our time are to be found at the neighbourhood level, from feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence to the lack of access to the infrastructure and support needed to make a change."

Evidence from the MiH programme suggests barriers at each of the levels in this section. With regards to barriers to asset development within a person, some obvious barriers have been noted such as caregiving and other responsibilities and therefore limited time to participate, although a number of programme activities have been specifically tailored for caregivers and are accessible to them.

We have not seen much evidence of people putting skills built through MiH to use for economic outcomes – we have really only seen hints at the possibility of this happening[20]. For example, the cookbook

20 *This is consistent with the* Rapid evidence review of community initiatives, *which pointed to limited evidence of community infrastructure and social capital formation resulting in higher employment levels.*

With Community Development Worker support, Making it Happen has instigated change not just in the number of connections people have but in the type and depth.

For men who were retired, the Shed quickly became a lifeline. They could come during the day, work on projects, and find a sense of camaraderie that they had been missing. But for working-age men, it was a different story. A lunchtime or early afternoon session wasn't an option. Caregivers, too – those looking after family members or grandchildren – found it hard to fit in. The Shed was there, but it wasn't accessible to everyone in the same way.

produced by DRI English language learners was a vehicle for showcasing their skills, not only in cooking but also in other areas. Three members of the group turned out to be graphic designers and one took on responsibility for putting the book together. The CDW who worked with them reported, "When another group asked us if we knew a graphic designer to help them I was able to put them in touch – potentially leading to paid work for the individual." MiH was commissioned to focus on health wellbeing, rather than, say, entrepreneurship, but it is important to note that unemployment and poor quality work experiences are major drivers of inequalities in physical and mental health. (Health Equity in England: *The Marmot Review 10 Years On*, Institute of Health Equity, 2020).

We can imagine that barriers to inclusion such as language or cultural barriers have been at play but we do not have sufficient

MAKING IT HAPPEN

evidence of this. We would also expect to see more evidence of this if there had been more mixing and bridging across social groups. At the level between people and services, however, numerous things emerged. One CDW reflected on facing barriers, "My experience has been a mix – moments of elation when our initiatives were doing well, and frustration when the system felt like it was working against them." The system "worked against them" when venues were not accessible or welcoming to certain groups, transportation infrastructure was not accessible (including affordable) or sufficient, and interactions with statutory services fell short of being collaborative.

The Wednesday Connect trips run by Explore The Arch started as a way to bring people together for shared experiences in nature and heritage spaces. People kept showing up week after week, because the familiarity and routine became part of their lives. But even with strong social networks in place, access remained a challenge. Some people couldn't make it because of transport barriers – the cost, the difficulty of coordinating accessible taxis, or simply not feeling confident navigating alone. Others faced physical barriers, like uneven terrain, a lack of seating, or toilets that weren't reliably available. Even small uncertainties – whether a toilet would be locked, whether there would be somewhere to sit – became reasons not to go. Renting buses meant older residents who might have stayed home could come along and be part of the group.

Champion equality and justice

Women at the Peacehaven Centre and Mosque, for example, sometimes had caregiving responsibilities that kept them from being able to show up. Other gender roles and expectations also dictated who was able to show up. Some of this was also compounded by physical barriers such as transportation, funding to keep things running, and the continuous work needed to go in to make the place inclusive and safe. Also very interestingly noted by a participant about the responsibility of moulding themselves to fit into a system that historically has rarely accounted for their needs, and therefore the work of inclusion still falls on those who are excluded.

There are significant urban and rural differences at play, having to do with the existence or absence of spaces for communities to gather and infrastructure, for example. In one rural area selected for the programme, evidence has surfaced about a frustration about a lack of a local village identity supporting engagement and cohesion. Without obvious spaces to hold events in rural areas, it can be difficult to forge connections, and difficult for people to develop an understanding of what they mutually care about. This is particularly relevant in light of this enmeshed nature of the social and physical that we have previously discussed.

Sometimes, more than one barrier exists at once. This is where the notion of intersectionality[21] is instrumental as someone who is disabled, unable to afford a car and living in a rural area without access to reliable and accessible transport options is likely going to have an exceptionally difficult time getting to an event. The inverse care law[22] also plays a role, in that those who need health care the most are more than likely not getting it, so if someone needing health care is participating in MiH, they are likely already facing challenges to participation. Groups have tried their best to account for this, but there are limitations to how much influence they can have.

21 *Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined this term in 1989 to describe how forms of discrimination based on someone's race, class, gender and other aspects of their identity intersect and compound to create "interlocking oppressions"(or privilege), an idea which came from the Combahee River Collective in the 1970s. They wrote: "the synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives".*

22 *GP Julian Tudor Hart coined the 'inverse care law' 50 years ago to describe the paradox in which people who need health care most are least likely to receive it.*

Above: Explore The Arch artwork from the Four Courts Connect project.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Shifts on the ground

Participation in MiH activities has changed people's health and wellbeing[23]. Indications of improvements to mood as a result of participating in MiH include having less "anxiety" and being "calmer". Someone from the Hastings and St Leonards Drum Circle disclosed, "The Drum Circle supported me and my husband during his cancer diagnosis and recovery. It has reduced my stress and anxiety and keeps me strong during the week's challenges. The community belonging and connection, the joy, friendship, fun and laughter makes me remember what it truly is to be human."

Above: Uckfield's Warm Welcome Café

Similarly, a volunteer from Warm Welcome Café, the first warm space in Uckfield Town Centre, said about a participant, "[She] told us that she wanted everyone to know that her cancer is incurable and untreatable. She has been given meds to prolong her life and at the moment feels well. She went on to say that the warm space is a lifeline for her, it keeps her going and she so looks forward to coming. She doesn't know where she would be without it."

▶ **Video link**

The purpose of groups has evolved over time and, in some cases, people who initially made connections through one group or activity have gone on to set up new initiatives.

What's more, many groups funded through MiH bring people outside and involve them in green spaces, which participants have connected to improved wellbeing, citing positive effects on their health, such as a project participant reporting feeling "brighter and better" and that they "slept better" after a nature walk.

All of these impacts contribute to individuals' capacities to engage more consistently, deeply and/or widely, and evidence supports the idea that these improvements influence not just individual wellbeing but their relationship to their community and collective efficacy.

23 *This is consistent with the Rapid evidence review of community initiatives, which found that increased social capital and participation in community assets are associated with improved mortality rates, improved health-related quality of life metrics and improved health-related behaviour, and lead to lead to positive social outcomes "including increased community resilience, reduced loneliness, reduced homelessness and reduced offending rates, improved wellbeing, and reduced pressure on frontline services".*

Above: Community litter-pick in Newhaven
Opposite: Women of Vision in Rother

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The following stories exemplify these shifts on the ground across the areas where MiH has been delivered.

Wealden

Wealden is the largest district in East Sussex by area, covering a vast rural geography that includes part of the South Downs National Park and the High Weald. Despite being the largest district by area, Wealden has no single town centre. Its population is spread across many small market towns and villages, with each having its own distinctive character and assets. *This district was chosen as one of the priority areas for MiH due to its pockets of deprivation, rural isolation, and limited access to community infrastructure in areas like Polegate, despite being part of a generally more affluent district.*

Selby Meadows
More than an open space
For years, Selby Meadows was just an open space – a stretch of land that no one quite knew what to do with. Then, a handful of residents started gathering there, planting a few trees, and setting up a small composting area. At first, it was just a quiet effort, something they did on their own. But the more they worked, the more people noticed. A retired teacher began hosting nature walks, sharing stories about local wildlife. A group of parents started bringing their children, showing them how to plant flowers and look after the land. Someone suggested adding benches, then another offered to build them. The Meadow became more than just a green space – it became a place where people crossed paths, where conversations started, where collaboration happened naturally. It wasn't an organised project with strict rules; it was a shared space that belonged to everyone. Now, more than a decade on, Selby Meadows is still cared for by the community. The people

who helped shape it are still there – some teaching, some learning, all connected by the simple act of tending to something together.

Artytime
Ramping up
The skatepark next to the Artytime Scrapstore in Crowborough has been part of the local landscape for years, used by skaters but not well cared for. Over time, a small group of volunteers began to change that. Led by B, a long-time local resident, they started by repainting the ramps with help from young people and a local artist, bringing new life to the space and getting people talking. With support from MiH, Artytime began working on plans to extend the skatepark and the scrapstore they also run, envisioning the new space as a youth-led hub for skate lessons and creative projects. Young people were involved from the start, helping shape the designs and expressing interest in leading sessions for others. It hasn't all been smooth – consultations clashed with holidays, bureaucratic processes have slowed things down, and some of the original young people have since moved on. But, interest has stayed strong. Local artists are donating work for a fundraising exhibition, volunteers keep coming forward, and connections are growing across schools, youth services, and community groups. What started as a practical upgrade has gradually become a wider community effort. It's still in progress, but the sense of local ownership and momentum is clear.

Crochet and chat
Stitching community
When the Hailsham Crochet Club first started, it was just a handful of people learning stitches and sharing patterns. During the pandemic, when isolation was at its peak, the group moved online, becoming a lifeline for its members. A woman who

was caring for her elderly mother described the weekly meetings as her only space just for herself. Another shared that, for the first time in her life, she felt valued for something she was doing, after years of being made to feel that nothing she did was good enough. The group built confidence, connection, and a sense of belonging. When restrictions were lifted, members finally met in person again, and the bonds they had formed only grew stronger. Together, they made baby hats for premature infants, blankets for those in need, and even a footstool as a Christmas gift. What started as a simple crochet circle had become a community of care, proving that sometimes, the smallest stitches can hold people together in the biggest ways.

Warm Welcome
Creating comfort
When the Manor Park and Hempstead Fields Residents Association in Uckfield first started thinking about running a warm space in late 2022, they weren't sure who would come. They'd heard concerns from local residents about the cost of heating, and wanted to offer somewhere free, warm, and welcoming through the winter. They already had a team of volunteers in place from their good neighbour scheme and car service. With support from a Small Sparks grant, they were able to get the warm space up and running in a centrally located venue with free parking. It opened in November and started quietly with just two or three people coming in to chat, read the paper, or play a game of dominos. Over the weeks, numbers steadily grew, with some sessions seeing up to 17 people. What stood out was the mix of people who came. Older men, often less visible in community settings, began to attend regularly. Others included wheelchair users and parents with young children. Volunteers, who were trained informally in offering advice and signposting, noticed that some attendees were living alone and really valued the regular contact.

As part of a wider network of warm spaces in Uckfield, the group shared learning and adapted based on feedback. When one warm space struggled with access, another group stepped in to offer transport. The experience also helped the Residents Association build new connections with the community fridge, local businesses, and other services.

Rother

Rother is a predominantly rural district in East Sussex, encompassing historic towns such as Bexhill-on-Sea, Rye, and Battle. The district is named after the River Rother, which flows through it, and is known for its picturesque landscapes, including the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. *This district was selected for its rural isolation, older population profile, and high levels of social isolation and deprivation in towns like Bexhill and Rye.*

The stories from Rother reflect the different ways people come together to rebuild connection and confidence often in response to isolation, mental health challenges, or limited access to support. Some groups focus on quiet routine and shared activity, while others open up space for honest conversations, creative leadership, or growing local influence. What links them is not a single model, but a set of conditions – trust, consistency, and local ownership, all that allows people to participate in ways that feel manageable and meaningful to them. In these spaces, people begin to test out new roles, form reciprocal relationships, and shift how they see themselves in relation to their community.

Bexhill Men's Shed
Building togetherness

When the doors first opened at Bexhill Men's Shed, it wasn't just about having a space to work – it was about having a place

MAKING IT HAPPEN

to go to. Many of the men who joined had spent years feeling like something was missing. Some had lost partners, others had retired and found themselves with more time but less purpose. The shed offered something simple: a reason to show up. Some came for woodworking, eager to share skills they'd honed over a lifetime. Others came just to have a chat over tea. One man, who had been struggling with isolation, started by watching from the sidelines. It took a few visits before he picked up a tool, but once he did, he didn't look back. Over time, projects took shape – a repaired bench, a handcrafted planter, a piece of furniture restored with care. But the real work wasn't just in the wood. It was in the quiet conversations, the confidence that grew with every shared skill, and the friendships that formed between men who might never have met otherwise. One participant put it simply: "It's not just about what we make, it's about being here– feeling useful again." For many, the shed had become more than a workshop. It was a space where they could reconnect – with their skills, with each other, and with a sense of purpose that had once felt out of reach.

Battle Wildlife Meadows
Part of the landscape
At the top of Caldbec Hill, volunteers cleared overgrown brambles and planted native wildflowers, bringing new life to a once-forgotten patch of land. For many, tending to the meadow was a way to rebuild confidence and connection after lockdown. People who had never considered themselves "environmentalists" found themselves learning about native species, habitat restoration, and the delicate balance of local ecosystems. A retired teacher who hadn't led a group in years started running workshops for children, while another volunteer who had struggled with isolation found a new sense of purpose in caring for the space. Now, the group is working with

schools to pass on their knowledge, helping children create their own wildlife areas. What began as a simple act of restoration has grown into something lasting – people seeing themselves, and each other, as part of the landscape they are shaping.

Camber Community Group
People and pages
Camber Book Stop started as just a small community bookshelf – somewhere to borrow and swap books. But in a town where longtime locals and newer residents had rarely mixed, it became something much more. A small group of neighbours began connecting through books, then through a photography project that captured life in Camber, and later through a community newsletter. One resident, who had lived there for 30 years without knowing anyone, suddenly found herself deeply connected to those around her. Newer arrivals brought fresh skills – like graphic design – while lifelong locals shared their knowledge of the town, creating something that felt truly owned by the community. Even local councillors took notice, and one resident was inspired to step into leadership and run for council. This wasn't a one-size-fits-all initiative from outside – it was local people shaping their own connections, their own way, proving that change happens when it starts from within the community itself.

Friends Altogether in Rother
A warm table
With 34% of households in Rother being single-person and nearly 20% of residents over 65, Friends Altogether in Rother is bringing people together in the simplest way – Tilling, tea, and cake. "When you're on your own, you need to make contact with people – and the cake!" one participant shared. Every third Saturday, it's more than just a social event – it's a hub for support, with GPs, social prescribers, Age UK, Sussex Outreach Support, and local

services offering advice and practical help. Free hand massages, food to take home, and drop-ins from local councillors and MPs make it a space where community and care go hand in hand. Since November 2023, nearly 500 people have attended, and with a National Lottery grant now secured, 2025 will bring even more – befriending services, a Cancer Café, and digital drop-ins to tackle digital disadvantage. A local idea, growing stronger with every cup of tea.

Rye Youth Zone
Ours to shape
Rye Youth Zone began with a group of young people determined to create a space where they could feel accepted, supported, and able to reach their full potential. What sets this youth club apart is the proactive role these young people have taken in shaping their own future. They have actively reached out to key stakeholders – including Sussex Police, the National Youth Agency, FSN Charity, The Pelham, and Rye College – ensuring that their voices are heard in decisions that impact them. Through their efforts, the Youth Zone is not just a place to gather, but a hub for leadership development, ethical decision-making, and meaningful friendships. From securing a safe meeting space to running activities that build confidence and life skills, they are leading the way in making Rye a better place for young people. One of the young people reflected later, "We didn't think we had that kind of influence before. But now? If we want something, we'll ask ourselves first – what can we do about it?"

Running Space
Taking step by step
TRIGGER WARNING: this story mentions suicidal thoughts
One of the members from the group had lived with thoughts of suicide for years, but he had never said it out loud – until one morning at a men's breakfast in St Peter's

Church Hall. "There isn't a day that goes by when I don't want to kill myself," he admitted. The room fell quiet, but instead of judgment, there was recognition. One by one, other men shared their own struggles, stories of losing loved ones, and the weight they had been carrying alone. That moment sparked something bigger. A few months later, RunningSpace@Ashburnham was launched – at first, just once a month, then fortnightly, then every week. After their runs, some of the men started wild swimming together in the lake. Volunteers brought homemade cakes. They built something beyond just exercise – it was a space where no one had to pretend they were okay, but at the same time, no one was defined by their struggles either. Just after Christmas, his wife told him she had noticed a change. He had turned a corner. He told her that, for the first time in years, he didn't feel like he had ruined the holidays. More than that – he felt useful. He was leading sessions now, helping others hold on through their hardest days. What started as a moment of vulnerability became a community of men lifting each other up, proving that connection – real, honest connection – can be extremely transformative.

Right Path Hiking
Walking toward recovery
When J started Right Path, they wanted to create a space where people in recovery could connect, rebuild confidence, and enjoy the outdoors together. What began as a small pilot of six hiking sessions quickly grew, with over 50 attendees finding support and connection through shared experiences in nature. J welcomed everyone without judgment, adapting the hikes to suit different abilities and ensuring that everyone felt included. The group became a place where people could support each other while enjoying nature, making new connections, and finding motivation in shared experiences. One

participant found the encouragement to start swimming again, while others returned each week, drawn to the friendships and sense of purpose that had formed. Local organisations also took notice – schools reached out, social prescribers made referrals, and even a yoga instructor joined, seeing opportunities for collaboration. Right Path creates space for people in recovery to walk together, support one another, and keep moving forward.

Raise Your Voice and You Will be Heard
Routines to belonging

When Social Sundays first started, it wasn't clear what shape it would take – just that it needed to be a space where people could come together on their own terms. Some came for the food, others for the conversation, and a few just to sit and be around others without pressure to participate. Over time, small routines began to form. A regular group emerged, bringing board games, art supplies, and shared meals. One week, someone suggested a music session. Another time, a participant introduced a creative project. The activities weren't prescribed – they emerged naturally, led by what people were interested in and willing to share. As confidence grew, so did the willingness to try new things. A woman who had initially been quiet became one of the most engaged members, suggesting topics for discussion and helping set up the space each week. There was no pressure, no formal structure – just a space shaped by those who showed up. It was this flexibility that made Social Sundays work. People came as they were, brought what they had to offer, and in return, found something meaningful: a sense of belonging that they had created together.

Above: Let's Get Fishing, Eastbourne

Eastbourne

Eastbourne is a prominent seaside resort town on the south coast of England, renowned for its Victorian architecture, the iconic Eastbourne Pier, and its proximity to Beachy Head – the highest chalk sea cliff in the UK. The town has a growing population and serves as a hub for tourism, education, and cultural events. *This district was selected for its pockets of deep deprivation especially in areas like Shinewater and Langney, and the opportunity to build on underutilised local networks.*

The stories from Eastbourne highlight how informal, peer-led spaces can play a significant role in supporting confidence, wellbeing and local participation. Groups range from breastfeeding cafés and fitness sessions to youth forums and LGBTQ+ parenting networks, often emerging through shared experience rather than formal service delivery. These spaces are characterised by openness and ease of access, creating conditions where people feel able to take part, take initiative, and influence what happens. In line with wider evidence[24] on the relationship between identity, connection and wellbeing, they show how community capability can grow from settings where trust, shared purpose and affirmation are prioritised.

24 *For example, see What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2018),* Community wellbeing: evidence from systematic reviews; *Marmot Review (2020); McDermott et al. (2022),* LGBTIQ+ community support and mental wellbeing, Health & Social Care in the Community.

Shinewater Hub Gardens
Growing into place

The first time KA saw the space, it felt like an uphill battle. The ground was rough, the land overgrown, and there were plenty of people who thought it would never work. But KA, along with a small group of residents, saw something else: potential. They didn't start with a plan – they started with a question: "What do we want this space to be?" The answers were as varied as the people who showed up. Some wanted a quiet place to sit. Others wanted to grow vegetables. A few just wanted to be part of something. Week by week, the garden took shape – not through a master plan, but through people showing up, pitching in, and learning together. Someone with experience in advocacy helped KA navigate council conversations. Another resident, who had always loved woodworking, built raised beds. People who had never met before started working side by side, and soon, the garden became more than just a space – it became a shared investment in something bigger. The more people got involved, the more others followed. It was no longer just KA leading the charge – it was a community effort, a place where people saw what could happen when they worked together.

Eden's Mission
Keeping moving

At first, it was just about getting out of the house. A parent, juggling work, stress, and the daily chaos of raising a family, showed up to Eden's Mission Bootcamp, unsure if they would stick with it. It had been years since they'd done any exercise, and the idea of group workouts felt intimidating. But something about the energy kept them coming back – the encouragement, the sense of camaraderie, the way no one was left behind. Then, one day, they brought their child along. It wasn't planned, just a morning where things didn't quite line up. But instead

of feeling out of place, their child was welcomed right in. They ran drills together, cheered each other on, and by the end of the session, it had become their thing – a routine, a shared moment, a way to reset. Now, they never miss a session. Other parents started doing the same, and what was once just a bootcamp turned into something more – a space where families could move, laugh, and grow stronger together.

Bourne this Way
Something for us

When one of the parents first joined Bourne This Way, they were searching for more than just a playgroup – they were looking for a place where their family truly fit. They had spent months feeling isolated, wondering if there were other parents like them, other children growing up in families that didn't fit the usual mold. The first meet-up was a turning point. It wasn't just about the activities – the yoga in the park, the paddleboarding, or the shared picnics – it was the conversations in between. The quiet reassurance of seeing other families like theirs, of not having to explain or justify, of belonging without question. As time went on, Bourne This Way became more than a gathering place for Alex and their family. Through the group, they accessed well-being coaching during a difficult fertility journey, vouchers for self-care that had once felt out of reach, and connections that made everyday parenting a little lighter. Eventually, they stepped into a leadership role within the community, helping to shape the very space that had once been their lifeline. Looking back, they reflect, "BTW has always been there to support my emotional health journey every step of the way…I have a lot to thank Bourne This Way for, as I would not have accessed any of these things otherwise, not with the current pressures of the economy pushing up all the bills and everyday prices."

Latch on Breastfeeding
Normalising parenthood

When a group of local mums started gathering at the Breastfeeding Café, they expected a place to feed their babies and share advice. What they didn't expect was how much confidence they would gain in the process. After seeing a public campaign about breastfeeding, the group decided to create one of their own – on the Dotto Train, a popular tourist ride. With the support of the train crew, the mums breastfed their babies in public, making a bold statement: this is normal, and we belong here. The campaign sparked conversations – some supportive, others hesitant – but for the mums, it was empowering. One participant, who had once felt anxious about breastfeeding in public, later said she no longer thought twice about it. "If I can feed my baby on the Dotto Train, I can do it anywhere." The group kept growing, drawing in mums from all backgrounds – including those who formula-fed, who said they had never felt more welcomed in a parenting space. With plans for more community events, partnerships with local photographers and support groups, and a move toward becoming a CIC, the Breastfeeding Café has become more than a group – it's a movement.

Youth Voice and Cup of Joy
Ideas over tea

It started with a cup of tea. At the weekly Cup of Joy sessions, young people gathered at Youth Voice, chatting about everything from school life to local parks. At first, it was just a space to talk. But then, someone asked: Why don't we actually do something about this? That question sparked something bigger. One group of teens decided to tackle an issue they faced every day – school toilets that weren't safe or comfortable. They researched, put together a proposal, and presented it to decision-makers. Another group saw how disconnected their community felt and started brainstorming ways to bring people together. Slowly, their confidence grew. No one had told them to do this. No one had handed them a plan. They saw the gaps, they found the solutions, and they pushed for change. And in the process, they built something even bigger – a belief that their voices weren't just being heard, they were shaping what happened next.

Hastings

Hastings is a coastal town famous for its association with the 1066 Battle of Hastings. Today, it features a blend of historic sites, such as Hastings Castle, and modern attractions, including the Hastings Contemporary Gallery. The town has a rich maritime heritage and hosts various cultural festivals throughout the year. *Chosen due to significant deprivation, long-standing health inequalities, and a history of low community engagement despite strong voluntary sector potential.*

In Hastings, groups are not only creating spaces for connection – they are reshaping how participation happens, who feels welcome, and what leadership looks like. From storytelling walks and public planting to women's networks and queer football teams, the work here is grounded in shared experience and a commitment to inclusion. Many of these groups have formed outside formal structures, but have gone on to influence them – connecting people who might not otherwise meet, and building momentum for change across issues. The stories reflect how identity, place and power intersect, and how collective action can take root when people are trusted to lead in ways that matter to them.

Explore The Arch
Claiming the path

The 1066 Country Path had been restored and upgraded, yet it remained mostly empty. Even though the land had been cleared and the signage improved, the path still felt disconnected – like a space that had been changed, but not claimed. Then, a group of residents came together. Through storytelling walks and creative sessions, they started seeing the path differently – not just as a walking route, but as a living history of the place they called home. Older residents recalled how they once played there as children, how wildflowers used to grow along the edges, how their families had walked these routes for generations. The more they shared these stories, the more others began to listen. The path became a gathering space – not because of the renovations, but because people had started shaping it in ways that mattered to them. It wasn't about the infrastructure alone. It was about the connection people felt to the land and each other.

Gardening the Streets
Roots in the pavement

When the planters first arrived in Hastings town centre, they were simple wooden boxes filled with soil. But as people added bulbs, watered seedlings, and tended to each bed, they became something more. A familiar spot to pause. A place where conversations started. A small but steady reminder that shared spaces belong to the people who care for them. Gardening Our Streets gave people a way to shape their surroundings – turning wooden planters into places of connection and community. Every Wednesday, volunteers met up for "We Dig Hastings," where they tended the beds, swapped gardening tips, and caught up over tea in The Common Room. Some had never gardened before, others had years of experience. One man, after a group trip to Great Dixter, said it was the most beautiful place he'd ever seen.

Another participant, usually quiet, ended up leading a session, showing others how to plant bulbs. As the plants took root, so did the sense of connection. What started as a project to green the grey gave people the confidence to take ownership of their space and see themselves as part of shaping their community.

Hastings Rec FC
A level playing field

Hastings Rec FC was created to give people a space where everyone, regardless of identity, background, or ability, could play and feel welcome. It started with a small group meeting for informal kickabouts, but as word spread, more people joined – especially those who had never felt comfortable in traditional football clubs – especially trans, non-binary, and queer players – began showing up. For some, it was the first time they had played since childhood. For others, it was their first time ever stepping onto a pitch. There were no tryouts, no pressure, no expectations – just a shared love for the game. But what really made Hastings Rec FC different was its commitment to accessibility. Some players couldn't afford subs, so they introduced a "pay what you can" system. When winter came and turnout dipped, they secured funding to cover pitch hire, ensuring no one had to stop playing just because of the cost. One player put it simply: "I've never been part of something like this before. It's not just about football. It's about finding a place where you're welcome, just as you are."

Women's Voice
Finding each other in common

At first, they didn't see themselves as part of the same fight. Some were advocating for better childcare, others for safer streets. A few were focused on mental health support, while others were pushing for more inclusive local policies. Their causes felt separate – each group working in its

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Above: Take Action Man: Project Rewild, Hastings

own space, struggling to be heard. Then, one meeting changed everything. A group of women, all from different backgrounds, sat down together for the first time. As they spoke, they began to see the overlaps – how childcare struggles weren't just about parenting but about access to jobs, how safety wasn't just about street lighting but about having a voice in decision-making, how mental health support wasn't just about services but about having spaces where women could speak freely. Once they saw the connections, they started working together. One group supported another's campaign, amplifying voices that had once been isolated. They shared networks, resources, strategies. They met with decision-makers as a collective, rather than as separate voices. And slowly, they began to shift the power in their town – not by shouting louder, but by standing together. One of them later reflected, "We used to feel like we were fighting separate battles. Now, we know we're in this together."

Project Rewild
Around the fire
One of the most powerful moments in Take Action Man started with something simple–a fire circle. A group of men, many of whom had never met before. No one was asked to speak, there were no structured introductions, no forced icebreakers. Just the fire, the shared silence, and a mutual understanding that they had all come here for something – though maybe not knowing exactly what that was yet. At first, the conversations were surface-level – talks of hobbies, the day's weather, football. But over time, trust was built, A man who had recently lost his job shared how he'd been struggling to find purpose. Another, who had been going through a divorce, admitted he hadn't spoken openly about it to anyone before. The responses weren't advice or solutions – just nods, murmurs of agreement, and the quiet but profound feeling of not being alone. And then, they kept coming back.

The same men who had hesitated at first were now organising their own meetups – fishing trips, sea swimming, and long walks. They no longer needed the structure of the project to hold them together – their relationships had taken on a life of their own. One of the men, who had been skeptical about joining at first, later said: "I didn't think I needed something like this. But now, I can't imagine not having these guys in my life."

Lewes

Lewes District stretches from the rolling chalk hills of the South Downs to the English Channel, encompassing both inland heritage towns and working coastal ports. The town of Lewes is known for its historic Bonfire Night traditions, while Newhaven and Peacehaven offer contrasting coastal character and a strong sense of local identity amid change. Selected due to mixed rural/urban dynamics, economic inequality in areas like Peacehaven and Newhaven, and emerging community initiatives that could benefit from support. Across Lewes District, many groups have taken shape around shared experience, from parenting children with SEN to navigating recovery or building community through faith and culture. What links them is not a single identity or activity, but a relational approach to support: rooted in trust, shaped by those who show up, and sustained through everyday acts of connection. Rather than fixed programmes, these are spaces where leadership is distributed, needs are met informally, and belonging is built over time. The work here reflects how peer support and cultural responsiveness can open up new possibilities for participation, especially for those who have often felt overlooked in formal systems.

Peacehaven Community Centre and Mosque
Leading from within
At first, they thought they needed to tell people what was available – laying out schedules, setting up workshops, organising speakers. But then, something shifted. Instead of trying to create programmes from the top down, they started asking people what they wanted. The answers were simple: time, space, and trust. Some women just wanted a place to meet without expectations, to share stories over tea. Others had skills they wanted to teach – sewing, cooking, digital literacy – but had never seen themselves as "teachers."
So, they stepped back and let the community take the lead. A casual gathering turned into a peer-led learning space. A group that started with shared meals became a support network. The centre had always been a place of faith and culture, but by listening – really listening – it became something even more: a space shaped by the people who used it, where leadership was shared and belonging was built from the ground up.

Peacehaven Carers Wellbeing
Holding each other up
Parenting a child with special educational needs (SEN) can sometimes feel isolating, but at the Peacehaven SEN Support Group, no one has to figure it out alone. What started as a simple gathering has turned into a close-knit network where parents don't just receive support – but also offer it. Every session, they swap advice, share stories, and lift each other up, building confidence and knowledge along the way. The WhatsApp group has become a lifeline, buzzing with encouragement and practical help, proving that support isn't just about services – it's about people turning to one another. And while they can't meet as often as they'd like, they're making sure no one is left behind, connecting families to other groups and resources so the support continues long after each session ends.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Above: Making it Happen final event © Clive Jarman

Peacehaven SEN Parent Peer Support groups

A circle of care

When Courtney Pilgrim first started the Peacehaven SEN Support Group, she wasn't sure how many parents would turn up. She knew there was a need – parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) often felt isolated, navigating challenges alone. But she also knew that a group like this had to grow in its own way, shaped by the people who came through the door. And they did come. Week after week, parents showed up – not just for information, but for each other. Some had never spoken openly about the struggles of raising a child with SEN. Others had spent years searching for a space where they didn't have to explain themselves. The group became that space. What made it work wasn't just the workshops or structured learning – it was the WhatsApp messages exchanged in between, the reassurance shared on difficult days, the friendships forming beyond the sessions. When one week saw an overwhelming number of parents bringing their children, it threw off the usual structure – but instead of seeing it as a problem, the group embraced it. Laughter filled the room as kids played, and parents found joy in simply watching their children be themselves. And then, something unexpected happened. Through a connection made via MiH, the group was invited on a day out with another parent support network, offering families a rare chance to relax together. That's how the group continued to evolve – not through rigid planning, but through the relationships and needs that emerged naturally. The biggest challenge now? There weren't enough sessions to meet the demand. But even when they couldn't meet in person, they made sure no one ever felt alone.

Start 2 Finish

In good company

At first, it was just a handful of people, meeting quietly, unsure if the group would grow. Some had come out of rehab, rebuilding their lives one step at a time. Others were looking for a connection – somewhere to go that wasn't a service, a meeting, or an obligation. Just a space where they could be. There was no formal outreach, just word-of-mouth. But that was enough. Slowly, the group took shape. Some started bringing friends, others shared their skills – cooking, music, creative projects. One person, after months of attending, said it was the first time in years they felt part of something. As time went on, the impact became clear. The group connected with local councils, gaining recognition and partnerships that helped them sustain what they had started. Now, they're looking ahead, thinking about how they can expand – maybe into arts, maybe into new spaces – but always with the same foundation: a group for you, run by you.

Hospitable Environment

Connecting Newhaven

In Newhaven, a grassroots initiative called Hospitable Environment has been quietly changing how people connect with one another and with their town. At a "Soup and Social" gathering with over 70 people from across the community, new and long-time residents, artists, historians, and young families came together when there hadn't been many chances to meet before. Over time, momentum grew. With light touch support from MiH, the group has hosted events, built partnerships, and explored how communities could be more involved in local planning. One significant achievement has been the People's Knowledge Exchange, an event highlighting the value of local knowledge and experience and creativity in shaping healthier, more connected places. The event brought together community groups, researchers, and some public sector staff. Although few senior decision-makers attended, those who did described it as joyful, energising, and full of potential. People shared examples of grassroots activity in Newhaven, from community bread ovens and public art to informal gatherings that help people feel more at home. They also spoke honestly of frustration that despite repeated efforts, they did not feel listened to by those in power. A key insight from this work is that collaboration takes time, care and trust, and space for people to contribute meaningfully. In this spirit, Hospitable Environment has been able to grow something both organised and open.

Make connections

Learning for the system

In this section, we aim to highlight what the wider system can learn from the programme, and what has enabled MiH to be successful in particular, to ensure that further programmes and engagement with local communities heeds how and why the programme has worked.

We have seen evidence that some of the recommendations from the interim report have been progressed but there has not been a wholesale adoption of them. Rather, they have been taken forward in organic, ad hoc ways without a discernible pattern. We have however noted where that progress has been made on these recommendations throughout the report. As the programme has come to an end, we propose another set of recommendations if the system in East Sussex is to embed the learning and maximise opportunities from MiH.

Practising an asset-based way of working

For East Sussex to fully embed community-led approaches, there must be a reorientation of thinking toward decision-making, resourcing, and delivering services and support in ways that are shaped by communities themselves rather than imposed from above. Resources in East Sussex (across sectors), much like most parts of the country, are oversubscribed and stretched but by finding effective ways to build reciprocal and trust-based

relationships, East Sussex is more likely to be able to realise the benefits of asset-based community benefits in support of its strategic aims.

There have been some efforts to engage senior stakeholders in the system about MiH's work and there appears to be a developing understanding and appreciation for ABCD. MiH has been presented at different county-wide meetings, such as Partnership Plus and groups within the districts and boroughs like Wealden District Councils Community Equalities Reference Group and Hastings Youth Group. This is exposing those in strategic roles to ABCD approaches and encouraging them to explore and embed ABCD approaches in their own work.

Part of our evaluation this year has been to gather insight from those who are overseeing the programme on how MiH is supporting a greater shift towards ABCD practice. There are a number of indications of institutions recognising the opportunities for instituting asset-based working with communities. Rother District Council has a Community Grants programme, which they are working to expand and make more accessible to community groups. The ESCC-funded Gypsy Traveller Health Improvement Service delivered by Friends Families and Travellers applies assertive outreach, asset-based engagement, casework, and recruitment of health champions (young people and adults)

Above: Environmental artwork made at Victoria Pavilion
Opposite: Smiles for Miles, Crowborough

to improve outcomes. The provider and funder have a shared understanding on embedding asset-based principles, having worked closely with MiH. ESCC has a stewardship approach to tackling loneliness, including the development of an action plan for developing social infrastructure rooted in the principles of ABCD, and at the level of Sussex Health & Care, there is a Working with People and Communities Strategy that sets out three strategic approaches, including asset-based working and removing barriers to empowerment.

Some examples indicate services have not grasped what working differently would really look like in practice and pointed to well-intentioned discussions around collaboration that didn't result in new ways of working. Still, some CDWs had success through bringing people into their work to better convey what they do. For instance, one CDW invited a council colleague to an event about the Four Shifts, which brought them into the world of the CDW and MiH in a fuller way. New approaches require time and capacity to grasp (not to mention,

Above: Young people at a Big Sparks event

"My experience has been a mix – moments of elation when our initiatives were doing well, and frustration when the system felt like it was working against them."

Community Development Worker

MiH took place during the Covid-19 pandemic), and those already working within overstretched systems often struggle to engage with what is beyond their immediate responsibilities. Practical constraints can make it difficult to look beyond what feels most urgent.

However, evidence suggests that some individuals have meaningfully applied asset-based practice. The Health Improvement Specialist – Arts in Health at ESCC has worked to get to know groups and what they do, and has been clear that building relationships with groups with no fixed agenda is both a sound approach but also helpful for doing his job. Developing authentic relationships has meant being better able to connect with groups over time for different reasons. Building trust and understanding at the outset is an important element of non-extractive working with communities. Historically, communities are meant to reach the system with a grievance or need, disadvantaging communities with less linking capital without the access to the relevant people in the system. Meeting communities where they are flips the equation.

Further, there have been a number of connections between MiH groups and formal organisations or services, such as with social prescribers and staff from family and children's services like Family Hubs and Amaze, that suggest certain services are starting to have more asset-based conversations with people. For example, when a MiH team member made contact

with the Southdowns Social Prescribing team to connect them with an individual, it led to a meeting with the social prescriber and the client to listen to their ideas/challenges, and a CDW had meetings with a resident and a Family Hub worker about how to support the resident with her idea to run a weekly session for mums and preschoolers for cooking. While CDWs have initiated or brokered many connections, others have been initiated by community leaders themselves.

Selby Meadow volunteers worked hard to engage with several formal groups. They actively built relationships with formal service providers to ensure it remained a useful and welcoming community asset. Conversations with the managers of a nearby housing development helped clarify shared priorities, ensuring new residents would have access to the green space rather than it being overlooked in planning. Engagement with the Children's Centre allowed for cross-generational connections, where young families could be introduced to the space as part of their early years activities.

These connections are positive but do not appear to extend all the way to joint problem solving between communities and services. However, there is evidence of more co-design of projects and activities owned by the community. For example, the East Sussex County Council Substance Misuse team are supporting the development of a Lived Experience Recovery Organisation (led by people in recovery for the benefit of people in recovery) in coordination with AiRS and have been exploring the inclusion of community-led initiatives for people on a recovery journey.

Other organisations (including businesses) are also starting to take account of community-led activity in a place in their planning and delivery. In one example, Vistry Builders' main contact site manager had heard about Bexhill Men's Shed through a crowdfunder campaign and wanted to know more as they wanted to get involved in building houses in the area and were interested in social impact. The builders were very keen and immediately responded to a request to help with volunteer labourers at the Pebsham Community Hub. Without the impetus to encourage dialogue between builders and local communities, Social Value requirements may have little meaning or resonance. A learning conversation led to something the building firm could engage with meaningfully where they could see the positive impact.

Those who are working to embed ABCD are starting to realise the benefits of this way of working. Through the evaluation, we heard organisations report that they have improved engagement with communities as a result of adopting ABCD approaches. They have also reported suggested benefits for their staff, including improvements in inclusivity and a more participatory work environment. For the delivery partners in MiH in particular, the increase in knowledge and capability of ABCD approaches has been beneficial and they have been able to spread that learning across their organisation to support their other work.

Constraints to the proliferation of asset-based approaches

The proliferation of asset-based approaches can be constrained by the barriers that limit people's engagement with activities, as discussed earlier in the report. Many MiH projects have used their grant funding to substitute for a lack of infrastructure required for people's participation in their activities, such as transport or spaces.

One of the recommendations we made in the interim report was to share the learning and tools from MiH across the system, and to build a movement more than a collection of projects–to support learning at a community rather than just project level. This has been happening in some ways, but there are open questions as to how this will work moving forward. We could see more incentives to collaborate, infrastructure to support collaboration. A lot of concern about sustainability is relevant here; MiH has created a collaborative culture but in its absence, there may be snapping back to its previous state i.e. one of competition for resources, since systems naturally snap back in resistance to change [25]. We also made another recommendation in the previous report to create a clear strategy for influencing the wider system. This didn't happen in a notable way during the programme.

As detailed in the section on barriers, we have evidence that there are people with experiences of marginalisation who have encountered barriers to participation in activities and access to services. In the case of Black Butterfly, which works with Afro-descendent and displaced communities in East Sussex to challenge oppressive systems, the project has successfully brought in a wide range of groups, but hurdles to do with funding and finances have created frustration for the lead project facilitator who lamented the administrative burden of obtaining funding pulling attention away from the work.

25 *The idea of 'snap back' – that systems naturally resist change, important to consider when trying to shift its patterns and behaviours – comes from Canadian complexity theorist Brenda Zimmerman. (See [this source].)*

Recommendation: Protect and sustain asset-based approaches to foster community power

MiH has been successful in raising an understanding and awareness of ABCD principles and practices in East Sussex, demonstrating what it looks like for those who are inspired to become practitioners. In the process, MiH has built upon and platformed smaller organisations and groups who have been championing the approach for years. We have seen clear evidence of organisations and stakeholders taking note of the work of MiH and ABCD approaches and testing them out, as indicated in the previous section.

As described in the introduction, why MiH has worked so well is in part because of a whole way of working. The enactment of this way of working across communities, by CDWs and lead project facilitators as well as some others from the VCS and public sector, has constituted a collaborative culture, which lead project facilitators and CDWs have warned could be lost through a 'snapping back' to a culture characterised by competition for resources.

This collaborative culture is one that has enabled people to build the social capital named in this report. Without financial and structural resources in support of local leadership, including places to meet, people are unlikely to come together to build their capacities or agency. (Rapid evidence review of community initiatives, HM Government, 2022). Protecting the sustenance of ABCD approaches through the way of working established during the programme should be considered vital to furthering the programme's legacy.

In Peacehaven, women from the Peacehaven Centre and Mosque expressed interest in community events but faced challenges due to caregiving responsibilities, transport limitations, and cultural expectations around public participation. While they were eager to engage, existing structures weren't always designed with their needs in mind, making participation difficult.

We also encountered examples of decisions made that directly affected the community but without their involvement. Supporting meaningful community leadership requires not only resources but trusted stakeholders with an understanding of the place to bring people together. The 1066 Country Path upgrade near Four Courts is an example of where better resident involvement could have led to more residents' needs being met. Instead, those with accessibility needs whose needs were not factored into the path upgrade are reportedly still unable to make use of the path.

Given that many public services have been reduced over the last 15 years, it is almost inevitable that those from marginalised groups will be poorly served by the more limited services available, which themselves often have fewer resources with which to meaningfully engage with those communities. And, the inverse care law tells us that there is a persistent pattern of people facing more social disadvantage paradoxically facing worse access, quality, and experience of some health services. (Tackling the inverse care law, The Health Foundation, 2022).

It is crucial that people and organisations trusted by others in their community are supported to work to mitigate the barriers creating marginalisation. MiH has acted as a connector for the groups and organisations that are less visible, and has created a platform for their visibility.

It is essential that they continue to be recognised and supported to ensure that those most marginalised have access to opportunities and receive the support they need from services provided in culturally sensitive ways.

Grappling with responsibility and scale

Many MiH activities have involved small numbers of participants, which has brought benefits in terms of accessibility and attendance but sometimes posed sustainability issues and created an over-reliance on a small number of volunteers and conveners, increasing their stress (running counter to the intended impacts of the programme). That these groups need to scale in order to be sustainable is an easy conclusion to draw, particularly as there is demand for these activities. However, many groups are working as well as they are precisely because they are small, local and contained. There is an ethos of not turning anyone away that is shared across MiH. How will spaces and relationships be maintained in a sustainable way?

Rather than adhering to traditional ways of scaling up or scaling out (spreading) the activities themselves, scaling deep offers an alternative way of valuing the work of deepening relationships, recognise the significance of context, and ultimately support systemic change. (The Art of Scaling Deep, Systems Sanctuary, 2025). Scaling deep is the "deep personal and broad cultural transformational work that is required to create durable systems change". (Ibid). This is already at play in many ways, evidenced through the strength-based approaches, empathetic work, knowledge exchange, processes of empowerment, and redefinition of success that has characterised MiH. Into the future, this could mean building and sustaining capacity through

shifting power to communities and ensuring funding models continue to accommodate impact demonstrated through non-linear ways and over longer periods of time.

Another challenge CDWs and project leads have navigated is how much support they can provide given the limits of their knowledge and skills. There are instances in which they can build the capabilities needed and/or acquire extra resources – such as safeguarding training. But also there should not be an expectation that grassroots activity will conform to specialist practice – striking a balance is necessary, and recognition and support from authorities is key.

Another challenge CDWs and project leads have navigated is how much support they can provide given the limits of their knowledge and skills. There are instances in which they can build the capabilities needed and/or acquire extra resources – such as safeguarding training. But also there should not be an expectation that grassroots activity will conform to specialist practice – striking a balance is necessary, and recognition and support from authorities is key.

Bexhill Men's Shed offers quiet support through routine activities and shared time. Many arrive for hands-on work– woodworking, repairs – but stay for the steady, unspoken connections. Local NHS teams and St Michael's Hospice refer men struggling with bereavement and mental health challenges, seeing the Shed as a vital space for connection without pressure. Yet, with no formal structures, the group remains entirely volunteer-led, and demand continues to grow. While the Shed provides an alternative to formal services, sustaining this support requires broader recognition that community spaces cannot carry this role alone.

> "The community belonging and connection, the joy, friendship, fun and laughter makes me remember what it truly is to be human."

Hastings and St Leonards Drum Circle participant

Nonetheless, in some instances, reaching that limit of knowledge and skills may signify that the state needs to assume (or reclaim, in some instances) responsibility. For example, the Neurodiverse Family Café came about when the idea was developed by a local resident frustrated with the absence of support for the families of children who are neurodiverse in the Havens area. Families began to feel a sense of belonging and to support each other. One day, Amaze and Family Hub staff joined, countering some resentment that families had about feeling abandoned and creating an opportunity to address their struggles – not through referrals but through meaningfully listening to families' own ideas of solutions. The Neurodiverse Family Café is just one of many activities supporting neurodiverse populations, with others including the Newhaven Model Railway Club and the Hedgehog Activities Group, signalling a role for the state in providing support.

In the interim report, we advised continuing to learn about and push the boundaries of balancing what a community can do for itself versus where professional (e.g. clinical) expertise is needed. We proposed mature conversations about risk. This has remained relevant through the third phase of the programme, though the space to have those conversations with voluntary organisations and statutory services hasn't transpired, as far as we are aware.

Recommendation: Maintain support to build system resilience

The assistance and funding from MiH has enabled the creation, growth and showcasing of a range of community projects across East Sussex that have enabled East Sussex to meet its goals for the programme to improve wellbeing. While a small minority of projects have reached a level of maturity where they are likely to self-sustain, the majority of them are likely to require continued support, funding or otherwise. Many projects have already stretched the resources they have available to them and risked burnout.

Hastings Bike Project secured MiH funding sought for improvements to facilities in order to expand their overall provision, which in turn led to opportunities for "increased opening times", "greater contact with the public than before", "valuable insight into ways the project can help people", and "a new wave of volunteers with a variety of skills". However, they described managing the uptick in volume of participants as "overwhelming" and bolstering financial sustainability as "a steep learning curve". Up to recently, they remained "still in transition" to a financially-stable community-led CIC with core staff. Even where a project has the demonstrable capacity, interest, means, and physical infrastructure to support expanded provision, and where such provision is facilitated by funding like in MiH, there is still the potential to encounter difficulties simply in tying all elements together.

There is a lack of available funding for projects of this kind across the borough and the funding that does exist can have higher barriers to application that some projects will not be able to meet. Projects may need funding that facilitates their meeting, such as rental or transport costs. As such, despite the dedication and commitment of those who run these activities, they may discontinue. Maintaining this activity should be seen as priority for East Sussex, ensuring their continued success and in turn the benefit to residents.

East Sussex residents have put in significant time and effort to deliver work that supports themselves and their communities and residents will seek the support and opportunities from these projects after the programme's conclusion. From a commissioning point of view, it is worth considering that fewer resources may be required to maintain these projects than to let them end and pay for others to try and set up something similar later. Allowing projects to discontinue may also further erode trust by communities in public institutions.

Some in East Sussex will have already had experiences with cyclical funding, where communities are mobilised only to be let down when funding stops. These experiences can reduce trust between communities and authorities and further hamper efforts in the long term. Ensuring that MiH doesn't repeat this pattern and instead finds a way to maintain relationships and activities will be essential for maintaining whatever trust that has formed through this programme. Community-led, locally-based action is integral to a shift to more prevention and impact on social determinants of health. Fostering system resilience will shift the dial on outcomes whilst ensuring value for public money.

Linking and learning across the system

One of the most significant enablers of success for MiH has been the varied role that the CDWs have played as champions and critical friends to community members to develop their ideas. Through their knowledge of local areas and the people in them, they have been able to connect community leaders with other like-minded individuals, or with the skills and resources that complement their own. They have supported people's access to funding through relational approaches whilst maintaining compliance and risk management. The role of the CDW is a role that has been more than the sum of its parts. There is room for the rest of the system to understand the holistic nature of this role, rather than only looking at specific functions discretely.

From the evidence we have gathered, it is clear that strong hosting and guiding by CDWs has been a key determiner in the success of initiatives alongside community organisers and leaders playing their part. Projects that have been supported by CDWs have found MiH transformative. For instance, Hospitable Environment, aimed at building resilient, sustainable and connected communities through food and creativity, has grown from a project that received £500 from a Small Sparks grant to bringing in over £90,000 in funding over the last three years. They found MiH essential by providing them with the support needed to manage the funds they were applying for and make connections to bolster their work, support that traditional commissioning practices rarely include.

Other examples in which the contributions of the CDW have been particularly salient include Bexhill Fishing Collective, which began with a chance conversation on the beach in which the CDW helped shape an initiative providing young people with the equipment and knowledge to fish. A Touch of Gentleness, a non-profit dedicated to bringing back the transformative power of touch and human connection, expanded beyond what they had imagined, connecting with organisations across the Havens and making their work more accessible to more underserved groups. Arts in the Pavilion built confidence and connections, with the CDW helping them establish partnerships that have allowed them to develop their project at their own pace.

They have also filled a crucial linking role, connecting communities and institutions across power differentials. In the interim report, we cautioned against expecting CDWs to play a stewardship role in the system since their capacity was already tight and they were not the best positioned to do it, but they have managed to do this anyhow.

At Shinewater Hub Gardens, for instance, the CDW played a key role in bridging connections between local residents, councillors, and community groups, ensuring that people with different priorities – whether growing food for personal use or creating a shared community space could find common ground. The trust-building here required time, and multiple meetings. In a place where past gatekeeping had made community involvement difficult, the CDW's presence on the ground helped shift the dynamics, gradually opening up opportunities for collaboration that might not have emerged otherwise.

The interactions between CDWs and lead project facilitators, and even others like councillors, have broken down walls that would otherwise keep communities from being part of learning. When communities

"We didn't think we had that kind of influence before. But now? If we want something, we'll ask ourselves first – what can we do about it?"

Young Person at Youth Zone in Rye

are involved in learning, their perspectives are reflected. Who specifically from a community is involved in the learning is therefore an important consideration as their perspectives are more likely to be embedded in the work rather than heard through separate consultation.

There is also much more evidence from the third phase of the programme of CDWs being contacted by formal services for support in reaching communities that formal services find it difficult to access, because they are operating on larger footprints. For example, a staff member in Adult Social Care and another working in equalities at ESCC sought to meet community representatives and groups from the Newhaven area through CDWs. CDWs also became a first point of call for involving local community views on Newhaven town centre development.

We understood in the first year of the evaluation that where formal services were making connections into MiH activities and referring people along, this wasn't always coming with resources or support attached. That is still true, and we have not seen evidence of a shift in formal services going as far as changing operating models to more localised delivery. To achieve the changes detailed in the Four Shifts framework, we would hope to see reciprocal relationships between formal services and community groups, rather than one-way or transactional relationships.

Changing how formal services engage with community-level activity will involve a fundamental shift within East Sussex and require services at different levels of the system to understand how their role might shift. In the meantime, there is much to learn from how CDWs have played a key role in brokering new connections between communities and other stakeholders.

Lead by stepping back

Recommendation: Foster links and learning between communities and institutions

When considering the future of community development in East Sussex, it will be tempting to look at MiH as a collection of functions and make decisions about which of those might be continued and who might continue them. This, however, would overlook one of the crucial elements of MiH's success which is the model, with the blended and varied nature of the role of CDWs at the centre. As described in the first sections of this report, CDWs had a flexible enough remit to meet people where they were and tailor their support. They played a unique role in stimulating the development of linking social capital, making use of their local knowledge to connect people across boundaries. CDWs also acted as the public face of the funding and grant-giving, providing lead project facilitators with a detailed understanding of how the funding could be used and helping them to make applications.

It is the cumulative effect of these different aspects of the role that have made the CDWs so successful at supporting ABCD in the areas where they worked, which were, remarkably, unfamiliar to some of them when they began the job. Anyone involved in considering what comes next after MiH must understand this cumulative effect and recognise that if this role is split out into different functions or spread across different departmental silos, it may not be as successful or generate the same positive impact.

Further, the way of working in MiH has supported CDWs and others to take an iterative approach with permission to 'fail' and take forward the learning. This learning has not been limited to CDWs' own individual reflection but rather a relational exercise that has taken place in different meetings and across teams/organisations, amounting to a programme-wide norm of learning and adaptation. This lessened silos and created forums for sharing insights as well as reassurance and peer support for CDWs.

We recommend that asset-based programmes and organisations consider how they can adopt a learning approach, focusing less on point-in-time and post-programme evaluations and more on ensuring that programmes learn and develop as they go, responding to needs as they arise. To the extent that others in East Sussex find the Four Shifts framework applicable in their context, it can be a tool and common language for structuring reflections and tracking change. Learning need not be driven by or held from senior stakeholders in the system but they do have a role in setting the tone for learning cultures.

The MiH commissioner from ESCC reflected, "I have never experienced a programme where positive words such as 'joy' have been so regularly mentioned." An approach to monitoring and evaluation that trusts people's intrinsic self-motivation and gives them autonomy can translate to meaning for them, benefitting the work. CDWs have themselves been able to feel the benefits of working in an asset-based manner in their own work.

Conclusion

The CDWs on the ground worked most closely with lead project facilitators but there were many more volunteers who became leaders in their own right through increased confidence and gaining new skills, and even more people's lives were altered through their involvement in the programme. Evidence shows that ripple effects of MiH have touched the lives of participants in funded projects, their immediate families, and neighbours farther from the programme activities.

Those involved in the programme have been holding and driving the embedding of learning from it. The question of who will do this after the programme's end is an unanswered question – as is the question of how to curate a learning environment for taking on board the learning. It will be crucial that this work of proliferating ABCD and the learning of MiH across East Sussex is held, owned and furthered not only by community organisations like Hospitable Environment and Compass Arts (as is already happening) but by leaders across the system who can nurture and build upon the learning generated by community organisations and groups – in a complementary rather than paternalistic manner.

Above: at the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) Health and Wellbeing Award event

The extent to which recommendations are followed and the learning enacted will in many ways constitute the legacy of MiH. Nonetheless, the programme has already left a legacy in cultivating resilience. As people have felt more capable and connected through MiH, efficacy has grown at an individual and collective level and resilience has increased.

> At Selby Meadows, volunteers have adjusted to changing circumstances – whether it's shifts in leadership, limited funding, or the challenge of keeping people engaged long-term. When fatigue became a concern, the group found ways to share responsibilities so no one felt overwhelmed. "We all bring different strengths," one volunteer shared, reflecting on how tasks naturally shifted depending on who was available. Whether maintaining biodiversity efforts or managing the space, the Meadow has remained active through small, steady adjustments that allow it to keep evolving.

Many factors have combined to produce this effect, consistent with Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's Rapid evidence review of community initiatives (produced on the heels of the Levelling Up in the United Kingdom white paper), which found strong evidence that

community infrastructure and social capital can have a positive impact on community resilience, and that many factors need to work together simultaneously to enable communities to thrive; any factor being missing or inadequate (e.g. inaccessible or uninclusive) can constrain resilience. (Rapid evidence review of community initiatives, HM Government, 2022).

The maintenance of social capital and community infrastructure is crucial for building resilience not least so that further vertical interventions by the state do not start from scratch. Nurturing social, physical and other kinds of capital on an ongoing basis means that when policy 'drops', there's somewhere for it to land.

This programme has underscored how much resource, both through the CDWs and the grant funding provided, is required for residents to build the conditions required to make change in their local communities. If these conditions are not maintained, they could recede, reducing the impact of the programme. It is likely to be far more effective from a resource perspective to maintain them than having to 're-issue' the resource again at a later date. This avoids the reproduction of a pattern of peaks and troughs in which conditions for trust, inclusion and capacity-building need to be renewed[26].

Across years of evidence, the way of working and culture of learning at the core of MiH has produced positive results, building social capital and community power, and enabling access to and improvement of community infrastructure. On the back of MiH, East Sussex has more connected, resilient communities aware of their strengths and clear on what is important to them. More resilience means greater ability to adapt, and as we face severe, intersecting crises such as climate change, having a greater ability to adapt is vital. The work of maintaining the factors that enabled communities to make things happen and build resilience begins now.

About Collaborate CIC

On behalf of the core leadership group of Making it Happen, Sussex Community Development Organisation appointed Collaborate CIC as Phase Two Evaluators to the MiH programme. We co-designed evidence collection methods with delivery partners in 2023 and produced analysis for the Interim Evaluation Report published in spring 2024. We continued to iterate evidence collection methods and conduct collective sensemaking sessions in 2024 toward the production of this final report.

Collaborate CIC is an innovative and growing social consultancy pioneering collaborative thinking and practice to tackle complex challenges across the UK. We believe that complex social challenges and inequalities need a collaborative, cross-sector response. We have a particular focus on supporting people to embed learning cultures and approaches in their programmes and partnerships, to enable meaningful and lasting change.

26 *In examining the relationship between money and community power in the Big Local programme, Local Trust found, "When investments were strategically directed towards these enablers [e.g. physical assets as bases of action and strong resident networks], communities not only gained control over resource distribution, but they also presented a compelling case for funders to invest in community-led initiatives, reinforcing the cycle of resident-led decision-making and sustainable power dynamics". (See this source.)*

Appendix

Area Rationale Template

Each delivery partner submitted an Area Selection Matrix at the outset of the programme to explain why particular neighbourhoods were chosen. These matrices combined quantitative indicators – such as deprivation, health inequalities, and housing challenges – with qualitative input around local readiness, gaps in provision, and appetite for community-led action. The rationale was not only about areas in need, but also about places with the potential to build on what already existed. The templates demonstrate the intentionality of place-based delivery from the beginning.

Area Rationale Template

Area Snapshots

At the start of MiH, partners co-developed Area Snapshots to understand the social, physical, and institutional assets within each district, as well as local challenges and opportunities for change. These snapshots were grounded in both local knowledge and data sources such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Public Health profiles, and partner insights. They served as working documents to guide CDW activity on the ground and were later updated to reflect emerging developments in each area. The snapshots help contextualise where and how MiH activity was delivered.

Area Snapshots

Above: the Making it Happen team at the final event

References

Colette Kessler, Teju Ravilochan, and Vidya Ravilochan *Could the Blackfoot Wisdom that Inspired Maslow Guide Us Now?*, Medium article (2021).
Link to source

Community Spirit: Active Communities and Healthy People, Royal Society for Public Health (2019).
Link to source

Community-centred public health: Taking a whole system approach, Public Health England (2020).
Link to source

Control and health inequalities: A review of theory and evidence for practitioners, New Economics Foundation, 2020.
Link to source

Greg Barradale, Vast majority of Brits feel powerless over local decisions – and it's eroding trust in politics, *Big Issue* (2023).
Link to source

Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On, Institute of Health Equity (2020).
Link to source

Julian Tudor Hart, *The Inverse Care Law* (1971).

Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (1989).

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990).

Rapid Evidence Review of Community Initiatives, HM Government (2022).
Link to source

Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000).

Tatiana Fraser, *The Art of Scaling Deep: Research in Summary*, The Systems Sanctuary (2023)
Link to source

The Hidden Health of Nations, Demos, Local Trust, and 3ni (2025).
Link to source

Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges, Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (2025).
Link to source

Toby Lowe & the Human Learning Systems Collaborative, *Human Learning Systems: Public Service for the Real World*, Centre for Public Impact (2021).
Link to source

Eastbourne projects
– delivered by 3VA

Bourne This Way: LGBTQ+ Support Group
A support group bringing the Eastbourne LGBTQ+ community together to be themselves, combat social isolation, tackle loneliness, and enhance their wellbeing.

Community Table
A chance for peer learning and support for community groups based in Eastbourne

Compass Community Arts: Pop Up Studios
A project to transform a pop-up art group into a permanent space, and to develop and mentor project facilitators as ABCD practitioners.

Compass Community Arts Free International University
An artist led research initiative which sought to understand of the cultural norms surrounding serious mental illness.

Crafty Trees
Sunday afternoon craft sessions for families at Willingdon Trees

DRI: Celebrating Diversity
An annual Sussex-wide community event celebrating diverse communities, and showcasing grassroots performers in Willingdon Trees and Shinewater.

East Sussex Zine (supported by Bourne This Way)
An LGBTQ+ magazine published and distributed across the county and at pride events throughout the year.

Eastbourne Chinese Community: Empower Dance Collective
A dance project focused on providing a supporting and safe environment for female participants to express themselves, relieve stress, and build confidence through movement.

Eastbourne Scrap Store
A community and volunteer-run space providing scrap materials and workshops for craft and creative use by the wider community in Langney and beyond.

Eden's Mission
A community project supporting those who have suffered the loss of a baby, or are facing physical or mental difficulties to develop healthy active lifestyles, Eastbourne - delivered by 3VA

Family Fun Gatherers
A youth initiative focused on fun, educational activities and opportunities for low-income families in Eastbourne: from coffee mornings to toddler groups to an after-school club.

Hampden Park Shed Community Café
A weekly community café providing a space to meet, share, and connect around things happening in the Hampden Park area.

Hedgehog Activities Group
A weekly, craft, cookery, and meetup group in Hampden Park supporting young disabled and additional needs people.

Let's Get Fishing in Shinewater
A fishing programme to support residents and young people in sharing new skills, spending time outdoors, and learning from volunteer coaches near Shinewater Park.

Let's Get Together
A weekly, community-led group offering connection and support to elderly and vulnerable members of the community, as well as parents with children.

Little Lambs playgroup
Volunteer led playgroup for families in Hampden Park.

Make Lunch
Food and care packages for families during lockdown.

Milk Matters Breastfeeding Group
A breastfeeding support group and café providing support and space for those needing assistance and resassurance with children of any age.

Pebbles Playgroup
A term-time playgroup for under 5s in Hampden Park, led by residents and parent ideas.

POP Group
An upcycling, recycling and foraging group for under 55s, parents, and adults to connect and craft.

POP Juniors
A family-focused arts and crafts group focused on recycling and upcycling materials.

PTA at Shinewater School
A parent-teacher association in Shinewater supporting a large student population to address rising gaps in budgets and school culture and life.

PTFA Oakwood
A parent, teacher and friends group to support Oakwood Primary Academy, provide activities, and raise money for the school community.

Queer Roots (supported by Compass Arts)
An arts initiative to empower and support young, queer and trans artists, including and a premiere at Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Residents Artists Network (Supported by Compass Arts)
An art challenge and network, inspired by local residents, to connect local artists across Eastbourne, address isolation, and build confidence through creativity.

Santa's Workshop
A Christmas community event to bring the people together.

Shine Playgroup
An Eastbourne-based playgroup, developed to offer a space to support and welcome families in the area.

Shineheart Collective
An environmental stewardship collective featuring volunteer and community engagement with outdoor space, and connections to local schools and children.

Shinewater Care Packages
A partnership between Make Lunch, Well Church and Shinewater Primary to offer food and care package deliveries.

Shinewater Community Garden
A community growing space in Shinewater.

Sky Creatives
An educational taster event to engage local residents with mental health support.

St Barnabas Lunch Club
Support for an established lunch club to provide activity packs and hot food to attendees.

St Peters' Coronation Event
A coronation party in 2023 featuring stalls, events, activities, food and more, bringing the community together.

Summer Gaming Club
A summer activities programme at St Peter's Community Hall, to provide a safe social space for children and young people over the summer.

Trees Toddler Allotment
A gardening group for parents and under 5's featuring structured and unstructured play, and a chat for parents to socialise and chat.

Turing School Community Garden
An outdoor learning programme to support students struggling with typical classroom environments.

Wadhurst Community Garden
A project to transform overgrown, leftover space in the Hampden Park area into a new, community garden open to all.

Wednesday Afterschool Club
A gaming club for children and young people over the age of 11 in Hampden Park, featuring games, crafts, movies, and practical activities.

Wednesday Refresh
A weekly youth group in the Hydneye.

Will Write
A creative writing group, bringing the community together to build new friendships and write collectively.

Willingdon Trees Community Cinema
A pop-up cinema project based at Willingdon Trees Community Centre, with plans for a regular programme of affordable showings.

Willingdon Trees Help Point
An early COVID-19 lockdown response project to support local residents both during lockdown and as they transition to post-lockdown.

Willingdon Trees Youth Voice
A youth-led committee developed to drive forward issues and action within the Trees Community Association structure, including development of a wellbeing café and more.

Hastings projects – delivered by HVA

A Town Explores a Book (by Explore The Arch)
A community festival centred around the Four Courts Hub in Hollington featuring events, workshops, exhibitions, music, and more.

AOI Bara Hollington
A county-wide community wellness project developing new sessions in Hollington.

Arts in the Park Volunteer Coordinators
Support for development of volunteer coordinators for the Arts in the Park project at Alexandra Park, Hastings

Arts on Prescription Peer Group
A peer support project by Arts on Prescription to provide a weekly peer-led creative group with wellbeing guidance.

Battle of Boyley Skating
A skate/BMX event organised by Boyley Action Group open to young people in the area seeking to improve friendliness and inclusivity in the local skate community.

Bike Lab / Labyrinth Arts
Refurbishment and improvements to build an improved offer and greater opportunities for volunteering.

Black Butterfly
Development of a community arts space, wellness garden and workshop space to combat anti-social behaviour and support displaced and disenfranchised communities from diverse backgrounds.

Bottle Alley Productions
A new online radio platform and physical hire space facilitating creative wellbeing opportunities in Hastings and the surrounding area.

Chambers Crescent Christmas Tree
A residents' association-led project to bring people together around a community Christmas tree.

Church Wood Community Orchard
Support for an educational event at a Community Orchard as part of the Home Grown Edible Gardens programme in July 2023.

Community Makaton
A community training programme supporting individuals on low-income to learn Makaton (an alternative language system using signs and symbols alongside speech and written words) and community choir.

Craig's Cabin
A community greening collective bringing the community together to benefit from being outdoors and working on the local area.

Creative Monday's
Creative space for the community to come together to connect.

East Sussex Veterans Hub Digital Inclusion Project
Provision of recycled smartphones for vulnerable people during lockdown

Education Futures Trust: Hastings
A project developing learning packs for children and young people in Hastings facing barriers in their access to education.

Fit Revolution
A community fitness group open to all providing classes to keep healthy and come together.

Four Courts Connect (by Explore The Arch)
A community arts practice project highlighting the overlooked history and heritage of the Four Courts social housing project, and bringing the resident community together.

Gardening Our Streets (Supported by Transition Town Hastings)
A community-led scheme within the Hastings Garden Town project to incentivise improvements to climate resilience, visual appeal, and biodiversity in Hastings town centre.

Green Man, Green Shoots, Green Economy (Supported by Hastings Men's Network and Transition Town Hastings)
An events programme to connect men across Hastings, Hollington and Castle to develop social connections, improve wellbeing and pilot new practical schemes.

Greenway Conference (Supported by Hastings Greenway Trust)
A local conference exploring the development of greenway routes, paths and facilities around Hastings.

HASHTA
A community group for Southern Housing tenants in Hastings.

Hastings & St Leonards Drumming and Music Circle
A weekly music space involving singing, drumming, and community connections to alleviate social deprivation.

Hastings Bambinos
A free weekly drop-in for parents and carers of children aged under 4.

Hastings Bike Project
A community project focused on cycle provision including refurbished bikes, repair space, and training and opportunities.

Hastings Breastmates
A Hastings extension of a Bexhill-based breastfeeding initiative offering support and guidance to parents.

Hastings City of Sanctuary
Community event aiming to promote Hastings as a place for those seeking refuge to thrive and build relationships.

Hastings Garden Festival
An event in White Rock Gardens, Hastings to connect people to plant work, and increase engagement with the garden space.

Hastings Greenway Trust
An umbrella organisation to facilitate community engagement, fundraising and local authority liaison in the Castle area of Hastings.

Hastings Library of Things
A community project providing accessible tools and resources for people in the local area to borrow rather than buy.

Hastings Men's Network
A project bringing men around Hastings together to connect, share, and learn new skills to improve confidence and wellbeing.

Hastings Rec FC
An inclusive football club for self-identifying women, trans, and non-binary people with a focus on social and mental wellbeing and equality.

Head on Board: Suicide Prevention
A suicide prevention programme using skateboarding as an engagement tool for volunteering opportunities, training, and employment skills.

Hastings Women's Voice
A co-production project focused on outreach to local women, with plans to develop a physical Women's Centre site in the future.

Hear Me Roar Women's Festival (Supported by Hastings Women's Voice)
A women's festival coinciding with International Women's Day as part of wider events taking place across Hastings.

High Rise Connecting Conversations (by ExploreTheArch)
An arts installation exploring linked stories of the Four Courts in Hollington, and a mirror neighbourhood in Kyiv, and the residents of both.

Hollington Remembers
A collective programme featuring five local groups in Hollington: Craig's Cabin, Hollington Community Centre, Surviving the Streets, Tidy Up St. Leonards and SIAM Boxing.

Just Friends
A new Hastings branch of a social club to tackle loneliness and isolation and engage the community.

Marianne North Botanic Garden
An initiative by the Marianne North Centre and Botanic Garden Project to commemorate the most famous woman to have been born in Hastings.

Marline Court Gardening Project
A green space development group with plans to develop a new, accessible community garden.

Mr Hastings and St Leonards Men's Room Website
Developing digital presence for Mr Hastings & St Leonards

Only Men
Exhibition supported by Arts on Prescription

Palestine on the Pier
A free festival by Hastings Palestine Solidarity Campaign in 2022 celebrating Palestinian culture.

Picnic: A Place for Photography
Series of photography workshops facilitated by Stop Look Listen and partner organisations to provide skills and materials for children and young people.

Popi Community Football
A community football scheme focused on supporting young men from asylum and migrant backgrounds.

Progress Network
A project to develop a new community space, 'Progress One', as a safe, inclusive space for workshops and volunteer-led activities.

Radiator Arts: Walk the Fish
A community arts programme celebrating work across schools in Hastings connecting children and young people with experienced artists.

Roots of Return
A grief-tending project in Hastings aiming to embed trauma informal communal approaches to wellbeing.

Hastings projects – delivered by HVA continued

SIAM Animation Project
An animation project by a local boxing group aiming at encouraging young people aged 5 to 16 to get involved with motion capture animation creation.

SOWN Exhibition Space
An art show in collaboration with a local charity and Hastings Emergency Action Response Team centred around HEART themes.

Stand Up for Nature
A series of workshops focused on protection green spaces and biodiversity.

Stitch TLC
A community sewing group for women to learn new skills, make friends, and improve wellbeing.

Take Action Man
A men's mental health group and network by Project Rewild running outdoor adventure days for men to open up and support one another.

Tempo Arts: The Space
A large scale arts installation development in Hastings using advertising hoardings to provide access to contemporary art by local artists for the local community.

The Green Room
A creative community space hosted by Energise Sussex Coast for local people to come together and develop ideas, actions, and events in response to the climate crisis.

Umbrella Sussex
A wide-ranging initiative including make and mend and library of things schemes, a chess club, printing services and more.

Xtrax Summer Project
A summer scheme aimed at helping children and young people aged 12-16 in Castle and Hollington with fun, social activities.

Lewes District projects – delivered by SCDA

A Land Within
A community launch event for an exhibition featuring poetry, workshops and guided walks.

A Touch of Gentleness
A volunteer-led service providing hand massages and peer support in public spaces and at local community events in Newhaven.

Alma's Place
A cookery project focused on celebrating diversity and cultural events in the Havens.

Amazing Futures (by Amaze)
A project led by Amaze to support children and young people in setting up a leadership group to develop events, activities and resources to reach out to other youth groups and encourage SEND friendly practices.

Augustfields Street Party
A housing development street party in Newhaven encouraging residents to come together and develop new connections in-person.

Bags of Hope
A project aimed at supporting people who are struggling with their mental health and offering suicide prevention provision.

Black Butterfly
A group developing an empty warehouse into a community arts space, wellness garden and workshop space to combat anti-social behaviour and support displaced and disenfranchised communities from diverse backgrounds.

Cats Club
A afterschool club project providing children with the opportunity to grow flowers and vegetables in a community garden.

Children's Lockdown Writing (By the Peace Community Centre & Mosque)
A writing project to publish books written by children in Peacehaven reflecting on their experiences in COVID-19 lockdown, with connected creative workshops at the Peace Community Centre.

Christmas Lights at the Bricky
An event in Peacehaven to bring the community together around a festive switch-on.

Cook 2 Gather (by Diversity Resource International)
A collective, volunteer-developed, and professionally-printed cookery book gathering and sharing recipes from participants in DRI's ESOL project.

Community Connection (by Peacehaven Community School)
A project connecting PCS students to the wider community through shared events, activities and games.

Community Maker Space (by Hospitable Environment)
A project delivering low-cost creative workshops to the local community in Newhaven, alongside redevelopment of a new community makers space.

Crafts for Wellbeing
A series of craft workshops in Peacehaven offering a safe space to learn new skills and crafts.

Culture Connect
A cultural enrichment programme celebrating diversity and inclusion, working with projects in the Lewes District area.

Culture Shift: Every Sort of People Party
A creative project focused on two strands – Voices from the Edges and Our Songs, Our Stories - with a joint final event involving a range of community groups.

Digging Down (via the Greenhavens Network)
A series of creative workshops to share creative community responses, led by Greenhavens Network members supporting involvement in the Inroads Productions project.

Diversity Resource International: ESOL Lessons
A project delivering English lessons to ethnically diverse participants from across Uckfield and Peacehaven featuring activities, outings, and roleplay.

DRI English as a Second Language classes in Peacehaven
Creating a learning space that is welcoming improves connections to local neighbourhoods and institutions, and build confidence amongst participants.

Earth Pan Plate
A cookery training programme for beginners and intermediates with a focus on food budgeting.

Folk School and the Dockside Barren Scrapers
Folk music group based around encouraging development of skills and musical awareness for people of all abilities.

Friends and Associates of Denton School
A school-support project to enable participants to attend community events, connect and fundraise for Denton School in Newhaven.

Friends of Meeching Hall
A community action group seeking to preserve Meeching Hall for community use.

Futsal Stars Anti-Bullying Workshops
A series of anti-bullying and self-defence workshops delivered by Futsal Stars involving a trained martial artist.

Garden Gigs
A free series of performances as part of the Artwave Festival.

Gardening in Action: Growing Communities Toolkit
A modular 'toolkit' development to offer a digital, printed and interactive resource for community groups, gardeners and volunteers operating in green spaces across East Sussex.

Havens Community Wellbeing
A mental health partnership developing networks, shared projects and events focused on improving mental wellbeing.

Havens Happy Boxes
A project providing at home activities for vulnerable or isolated older people.

Havens SEN Support Groups
A safe space initiative for parents and carers of SEN children in Peacehaven and Newhaven to connect and provide peer support.

Havens Young Creatives
A creatives supporting isolated low-income women from refugee backgrounds theatre working with and through CYP to local work of working with and connect.

Hillcrest Artwave
A community event based at the Hillcrest Centre in Newhaven as part of the Artwave weekend, featuring the Newhaven Wood Creatives, Hospitable Environment and more.

Hospitable Environment
A socially engaged arts & wellbeing organisation based in Newhaven, East Sussex, that brings people together using creativity and food.

Inroads Productions: At the Edge
A community sharing event in Newhaven bringing together creative responses to conservation reflections by participants aged 15 to 70.

Lewes District projects – delivered by SCDA

Just Friends
A social group for people who live alone (including carers), with branches in Eastbourne, Bexhill, Newhaven and with plans to develop further into Hastings and beyond.

Lewes District Anti-Racism Alliance
A network of organisations and individuals in Lewes District committed to working for racial justice.

LGBTQ Survivors
A peer-led online support group for survivors of domestic violence in the LGBTQ community.

Life in Lockdown (Peacehaven & Newhaven Youth Theatre)
A children and young peoples' project to develop a collective film reflecting COVID-19 experiences.

Lunch Positive: Wellbeing Workshops
A series of creative workshops held at the Hillcrest centre in Newhaven, open to people living with and affected by HIV in East Sussex.

MAD Bonfire Society
A community group offering bonfire events and promotional activities in the Meeching area of Newhaven.

Men's Mental Wellbeing
A group for local men to provide mutual support and improve mental wellbeing.

Mountain Men
A walking group aimed at providing a platform for men to talk and improve mental health.

Neurodiverse Family Café
A café space for neurodiverse families in Newhaven and the wider area focused on building relationships within the group.

Newhaven & District Model Railway Club
A social club centred around engaged with model railway enthusiasm with a focus on wellbeing, reducing isolation and providing a safe space.

Newhaven Art Space
A project developing art provision in Newhaven via workshops at the Hillcrest Centre and pop-ups across the town.

Newhaven Community Support
A support project for vulnerable people in Newhaven with difficulties accessing medicine and other amenities due to COVID-19 isolation or other factors.

Newhaven Flea Market
A low-cost market offering pitches to local enterprises and small businesses from across the region.

Newhaven Green Centre
A community group working to reduce waste and consumption through sharing and repairing, including repair space, a library of things, and advice services.

Newhaven Heritage Volunteer Walks
A series of monthly guided walks exploring heritage in the local area.

Newhaven Photography Collective
A community group bringing together photographers of all genres and skills across Newhaven.

Newhaven Wood Creatives
A woodworking club featuring a dedicated workshop connected to the Hillcrest Centre in Newhaven.

Newhaven Young People's Forum
A youth collective focusing on developing new benefits for young people in Newhaven.

Online Art Group
A continuing online arts group originally developed via Varndean College during COVID lockdown period to support vulnerable members facing physical or mental health difficulties.

Peacehaven Bee Corridor
A biodiversity project to produce bird boxes, bee hotels and more in the local area.

Peacehaven Carers Wellbeing
A group focused on supporting carers in the local area through activities, connections and more.

Peacehaven Community Centre and Mosque, Souper Socials and community initiatives
Aims to help those who might be experiencing a crisis whilst also helping the Mosque community to engage with the wider Peacehaven community, increasing confidence and helping diversity and cultural enrichment.

Peacehaven Community School intergenerational project
20 students linked with members of U3A to share stories and memories and produce a book.

Peacehaven Community Garden
A community group providing growing and green space and community provision in north Peacehaven.

Peacehaven D Day Commemoration
A community event in Peacehaven to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D Day.

Peacehaven Harvest Festival
Community festival.

Peacehaven Youth Theatre
Life in Lockdown project to work with young people to devise and create a film.

Phenomenal Happenings (by Latest TV)
A series of programmes for the local television channel Latest TV showcasing Making it Happen projects from across East Sussex.

Postal Pals (by Helping Out)
A project connecting the community during the COVID-19 through letters, pictures and support for lonely or isolated people with local families.

Mental Health Positive Communities (by Recovery Partners)
A collaborative service led by Recovery Partners working with four other organisations to co-design a more mental-health friendly and inclusive service approach.

Seaford Environmental Alliance
A community network focused on events, activities and engagement to combat the climate emergency.

Seahaven Academy Community Engagement
A project for students from Seahaven Academy to develop sustainable events and connect to the wider community around future ideas.

Seahaven Babybank
A project offering support and resources for children aged 0-5 to support those in need and encourage reuse and recycling.

Seahaven Pride Film
A project to create a film as part of Seahaven Pride to showcase stories of individuals and groups from the LGBTQIA+ community in and around the Havens area.

SEN Day by Day
A project delivering support sessions for parents and carers of children and young people with additional needs at venues across the Havens area.

Southdown Wellbeing Hub
A gardening group to support mental health wellness and wellbeing.

Start 2 Finish
A pilot project in Peacehaven for people recovering or trying to recover from substance issues.

The Folk School
A musical education and outreach initiative focused on teaching and performances by local folk musicians.

The Last Boatyard
A heritage project focused on social archaeology surrounding Newhaven's marine history and community.

The Land
A project transforming a private nature reserve near Newhaven into a open community space.

The Last Boatyard
A heritage project focused on social archaeology surrounding Newhaven's marine history and community.

Tidemills Community Choir
A community music collective connected to the Tide Mills Project to come together, develop new songs and sing.

Tree Walks
A project offering interactive activities framed around River Ouse walks, with storytelling and musical elements.

We Are the Tree
A collective bringing together women from Muslim or refugee backgrounds, including swimming provision, cookery, and more.

Wilder Gardens
A project developing a network of wild corridors, pocket parks and more across Peacehaven.

Rother District projects delivered by RVA

20:20 Running Club
A fun, free running group in Rye connecting runners of all ages and backgrounds.

AOI Bara
A community wellness and meditation project.

Art By Vicky Craggs
A community project providing arts and crafts sessions with children with special needs and their families.

Battle Festival
A project seeking to revitalise the local community following COVID-19 lockdown, through live performance, workshops, and more.

Battle Wildlife Meadows Group
A volunteer group committed to improving biodiversity in the Battle area, including management of a large green space on Caldbec Hill.

Bexhill Breathers
A support and exercise group for people with chronic lung conditions such as COPD to maintain their health through regular gentle exercise.

Bexhill Family Collective
A project focused on providing early years children with a range of outdoor experiences to build confidence and engage with nature.

Bexhill Fishing Collective
A community-led inclusive fishing initiative focused on teaching young individuals aged 13-18.

Bexhill Health and Wellbeing Project
A complementary health project providing natural health and wellness.

Bexhill Ladies Shed
An offshoot of Bexhill Men's Shed offering a space for women to create, learn, and share ideas and projects.

Bexhill Men's Shed
A practical working space for Bexhill residents to use and share skills, production and repairs with a social focus.

Bexhill Skate Park Action Group
A project connecting and engaging with children, young people, and adult skaters and BMX riders to develop further involvement in co-design of activities.

Bexhill Walking Cricket Club Christmas Event
A Christmas event by a local walking cricket club to bring members together and celebrate the year.

Breast Mates
A relaunched local breastfeeding peer support group in Bexhill.

Camber Community Book Stop
A community initiative to replace an existing community book-stop with more robust replacement, supported by a new virtual book club.

Camber Community Calendar
A community project during the COVID-19 lockdown to raise spirits and showcase submissions to a local photography competition in Camber.

Camber Community Coronation Event
A community association-led event celebrating the coronation and bringing the community together.

Community Compost Solutions
A volunteer-led social enterprise focused on developing and supporting communal composting.

Community River Watch
A collaboration led by Strandliners to improve connectedness to nature, offer waterside walks, and survey the local area.

Crafty Collective: Social Sundays
A weekly project at Bexhill Community Beach Hut focused around mental health support and reducing isolation.

Creative Language Through Art
A project in collaboration with Women of Vision to offer monthly support sessions through the medium of art.

Education Futures Trust: Bexhill
A project developing learning packs for children and young people in Bexhill facing barriers in their access to education.

Fairlight Oral Histories
An intergenerational project to develop interviews and materials that preserve generational experiences for future reflection.

Faygate Close Jubilee Celebration
A community event to bring a Bexhill neighbourhood together and build on online support networks developed during COVID-19.

Footbridge Gallery
A mini-art gallery on a public footbridge in north Bexhill focused on rehabilitating a public asset and developing new community use.

Friends Altogether in Rother
A befriending network for to reduce social isolation for those aged 60+ through networking, events, and activities.

Good News House
A social connection project.

Highwoods Men's Woodland Wellbeing
A wellbeing group aimed at helping men open up framed around woodland activities.

Little Bees Toddler Group
A children's group developing sessions focused around food.

Living Communities: the Big Lunch
A 'Big Lunch' event hosted at the Michelle's Dream in Bexhill bringing residents together.

Make & Mend Bexhill
An initiative providing space and opportunity for people to learn fixing skills, craft, and socialise.

Make (Good) Trouble: PEN Pals
A networking project connecting year 6 children to year 7 peers to support the transition to secondary school through creative workshops, communication and peer support.

Pass It On East Sussex
A community-led uniform swap shop.

Pebsham Baby Clothes Swap
A peer-led parent group from Little Bees Toddler group offering a baby clothes swap service.

Pebsham Community Centre
Community consultation to explore and encourage community involvement with the centre and garden.

Pebsham Community Coffee Morning
A community coffee morning project hosted at the Pebsham Hub led by the Jack Jefferys Superhero Trust.

Pebsham Community Hub
A community hub development seeking to build a permanent presence for social connections and support.

Rainbow Kitchen Magic
A food project to bring participants together to cook, connect, and learn.

Raise Your Voice, You Will be Heard Podcast (Supported by Crafty Collective)
A podcast project providing a platform for people experiencing poor mental health to share experiences and coping strategies.

Recycled Crafts
A half-day workshop supporting participants to learn new crafts skill in working with and repurposing recycled materials.

Right Path Hiking
A project providing opportunities to learn how to hike, orienteer and camp in a safe and fun environment.

Running Space (by the Pelham)
A running club focused on mental health support, reducing stigma around suicide and bringing people together.

Rye Plant Swap
A give-and-take project to grow a community of plant lovers.

Rye Youth Zone
A youth-led project to design, deliver, and benefit from provisions for children and young people aged 11-17 in Rye.

Sidley Road Show
An event bringing local services, clubs, and programmes together to promote health lifestyles and personal wellbeing.

Soft Play Social
A peer-support network for new parents to connect.

Summer Crafts (Supported by Collective Canvas)
A series of craft workshops for families in central Bexhill open to adults and families.

Sussex Outreach Support
A wellbeing and community engagement initiative focused on establishing rural hubs across Rother.

The Bexhill Sinfonietta Society
A project aiming to bring classical music to young people in Bexhill.

The Big Conversation
A discussion and networking event for charities involved in Mental Health across East Sussex, hosted at the Hub on Rye Hill.

The Compound (by WAVE Arts)
A community space development with a focus on community gardening and bringing individuals together. The Good Story

A café space developing community links for those in need.
The Linen Cupboard
A project providing clean bedding for vulnerable people.

The Music Well
A children's singing club in Rye bringing younger children and older young people together.

The Town Hut
A bookable Safe Space for Bexhill residents experiencing isolation, poor mental health, distress, loss or hardship.

VCSE Support Network Pilot
A pilot project to develop group support sessions focused on finance and forward planning skills.

Veterans Growth: Sow and Grow Along
A project offering seed, compost, and plant guide packages to enable participants to get growing.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Rother District projects – delivered by RVA continued

WAVE Arts
A local creative project which aims to transform abandoned buildings in Bexhill through street art and community murals.

Wilder Iden
A volunteer-led initiative to improve biodiversity in Iden.
Wildlife Matters Rescue
A wildlife rescue group supporting neglected animals through experienced and new volunteers.

Women of Vision
A support group for women who moved to England in the 60s and 70s to come together, receive support, and take part in arts, crafts and writing activities based on their life experiences.

Wealden District projects – delivered by Action in rural Sussex

Action Community Together
A continuation of work by Hailsham Community Hub to offer a uniform bank and more.

Alderbrook Community Planter
A community association-led planter developed to bring health and wellbeing benefits to the whole community.

ArtyTime: Skatepark Community Consultation
A community engagement project led by local activists to drive engagement with plans for the local skatepark.

Baby Bank & Beyond
A baby bank group in Hailsham and the wider South Wealden area looking to expand their provision.

Calamity Crafting
A craft group focused on building a positive and affirming atmosphere.

Christchurch Community Projects
A project to support the start up of two volunteer led initiatives within an informal partnership of other existing groups

Crochet & Chat
A community project in Hailsham to bring people together to socialise around collective crochet.

Crowborough Community Hub (supported by ArtyTime)
A partnership between Network Rail and ArtyTime to transform a disused part of Crowborough station into a new community space

Crowborough Community Orchard
To create and sustain community orchards in Crowborough

Crowborough Wildlife Group
A environmental awareness group working to increase residents' access to nature, and record wildlife in and around Crowborough.

DRI English as a Second Language classes in Uckfield
creating a learning space that is welcoming improves connections to local neighbourhoods and institutions, and build confidence amongst participants.

Forest Time Uckfield
A group aiming to encourage freedom and creative play for children in a natural environment.

Green Transition Crowborough
A community organisation promoting local action to address climate change and encourage sustainability.

Hailsham Boxing Club
Mother and baby group in Hailsham to encourage mums to come together, exercise alongside babies, and foster connections.

Hailsham Festival
A project which sought to tackle rural social isolation in Hailsham residents caused by COVID-19

Hailsham Friends Club
Social club for people who live alone or are carers.

Hailsham Kinship Carers
Picnic and activity day for the carers and children of kinship families, so the children know they aren't the only ones living with grandparents or aunts and uncles.

Hailsham POP Group
Community herb and kitchen garden using existing allotment space, with volunteer involvement in growing and harvesting

Jarvis Brook Skatepark Extension (supported by ArtyTime)
A youth-led campaign to extend the local skatepark, and offer new youth facilities alongside new scrapstore provision.

Jarvis Brook Festival
Community festival which sought to raise awareness of plans for the skatepark

Monday Youth Club
A youth club for 15-17 year olds in the centre of Crowborough held within Crowborough Social Club.

Moonlight Dreams CIC Circus Skills
Professional circus skills training to people from all backgrounds.

PDA Sense
Monthly peer support group for parents and carers of PDA people (a profile of autism).

Plot 50
Community Allotment space.

Polegate Jubilee Nature Reserve
A project to develop and gifted by Polegate Town Council to the local community into a communal nature reserve.

Polegate Scarecrows Community Fund
A community cleaning initiative in Polegate enabling residents to join in with community litter picking and further activities.

Selby Meadow
Community land project aiming to develop useable natural space through planting and natural maintenance of the meadow.

Smiles for Miles
Development of a 'men's shed' group open to everyone in Crowborough.

South Brockwell Farm School
A project to expand the provision of the Farm School to support disadvantaged children and young people, and increase environmental awareness.

Sunflower Mental Health & Wellbeing
A information and awareness project in Polegate, providing mental health and wellbeing support around anxiety, domestic violence, and more.

Sussex Support Services: Wealden Older People's Network
A peer support network for those working with the older population in Wealden, providing advice, ideas, and support.

Time for Tea and Friends (Supported by Ridgewood Village Hall)
A friendship group working with the Housebound Group to provide a lunchtime and afternoon group with food and entertainment.

Uckfield Youth Club: Street Art Project
An urban arts project teaching young people the tools and skills to create and produce street art.

Victoria Pavilion Arts
An arts-based wellbeing programme for parents and carers of children and young people between 11-14 to manage mental health challenges.

Walk Talk Walk
A mental health-focused walking group including picnics, group walks and more.

Warm Welcome Café
Warm space which encourages users to be involved in developing activities and skill sharing.

Community artworks

Grassroots community arts activity has been a core feature of Making it Happen, which has contributed significantly to findings shared in this report about improved wellbeing, confidence, agency and ultimately, to building community power. We wanted to recognise the vital role that groups providing support to people to tap into and encourage creativity have played, and invited groups we had worked with to share artworks, illustrations, designs or other creative work for inclusion in this final report. The results are shared here and throughout the report.

We received submissions from:
Arts on Prescription
Artytime
Compass
Dockside Barrel Scrapers
Explore The Arch
Hospitable Environment
POP Group
Victoria Pavilion Arts
WAVE Arts
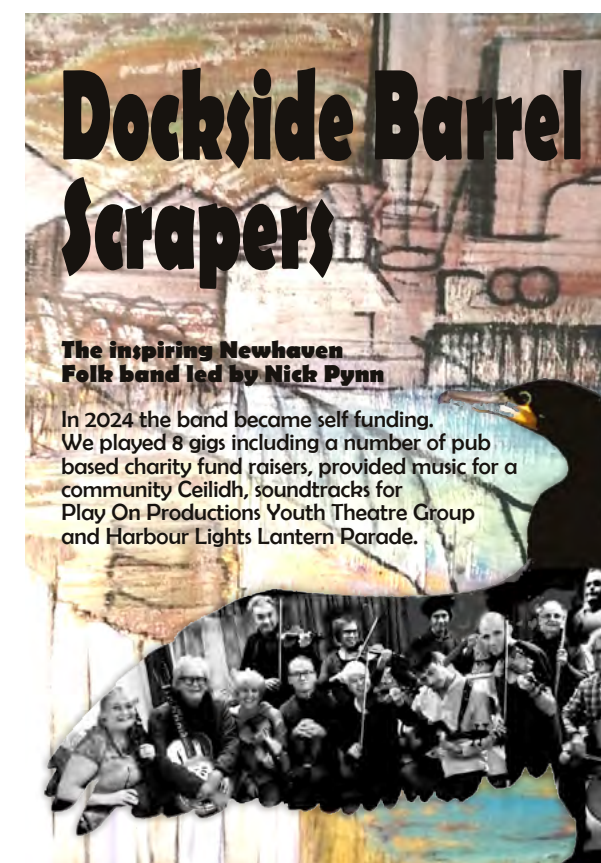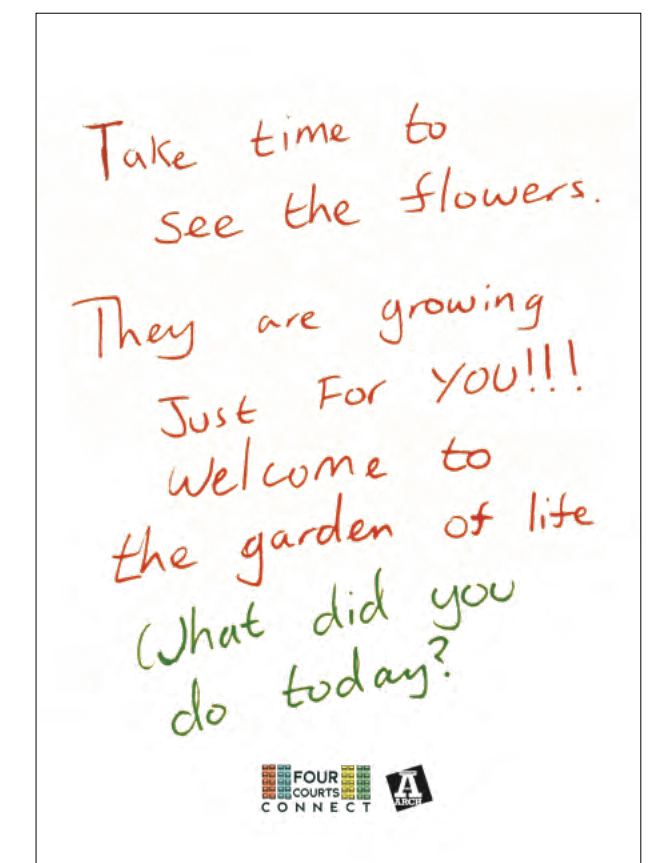Youth Voice and Cup of Joy

Art in the Park
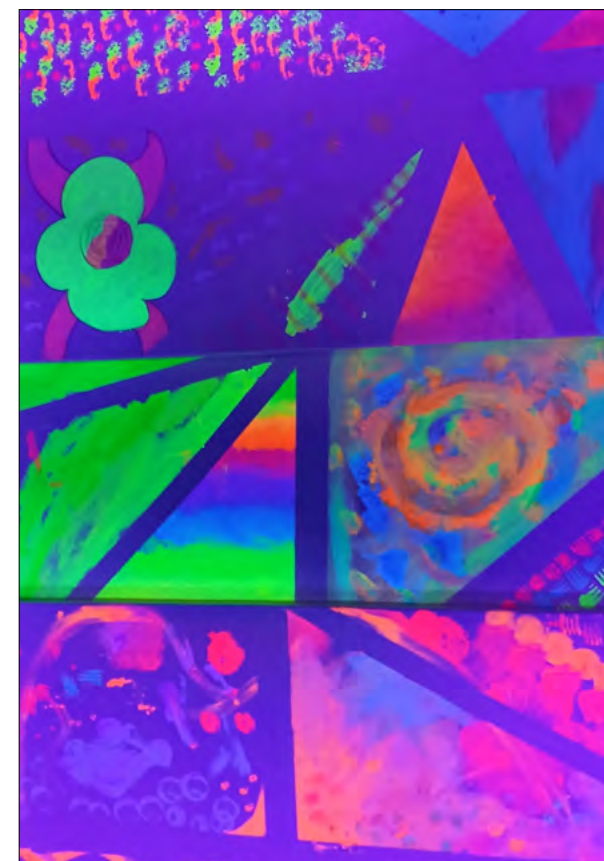

Artytime
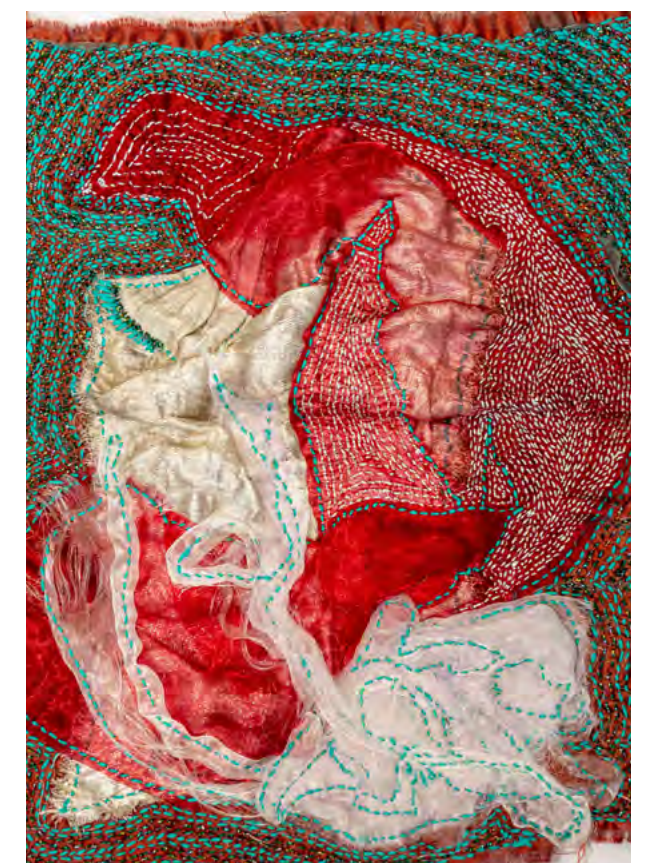
Compass

Dockside Barrel Scrapers

Explore The Arch

Hospitable Environment

POP Group

Youth Voice and Cup of Joy

Victoria Pavilion Arts

Wave Arts

Remembering Velda

Lead volunteer Velda's contributions to Selby Meadows are deeply embedded in its history and ongoing stewardship. As a key figure in shaping and sustaining the space, she played a central role in rallying volunteers, sharing knowledge about conservation, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the land. Her passing last year was a profound loss to the community, but her legacy continues in the hands of those who worked alongside her. The principles she upheld – community leadership, environmental care, and intergenerational learning – remain at the heart of Selby Meadows, ensuring that her vision of a community-held space lives on.

Remembering Louise

Louise was a key member of the Making it Happen Team based at HVA in Hastings. She was an amazing community worker who led one of the best 'Healthy Living Centre' projects in the country, supporting local communities and a huge number of volunteers. When working on 'Making it Happen' her experience of groups, neighbourhoods and people contributed to making the Hastings she loved, an even better place to be. Louise was a wonderful friend and member of the team, a person who enjoyed life to the full and whose laughter, friendship and knowledge we still miss.