

Access to services – Storrington, West Sussex



In 2009, Storrington Community Partnership approached Action in rural Sussex (AirS) to be part of the Rural Access to Services Programme. Storrington was a natural choice, as one of our models of delivery for the programme is a medium sized town that is looked to for services by surrounding communities. A survey was undertaken to identify priorities for the community and a number of projects arose out of the findings, one being the provision of outreach job seeking and benefits advice sessions in the Town. Local residents could only access such services by travelling to Worthing or Horsham. Therefore, those who were unemployed and who lived in Storrington or any of the surrounding villages had to make a round trip of 20 miles to use JobCentre Plus facilities.

Sarah Day, from AirS, has developed the project in partnership with the Storrington Community Partnership, JobCentre Plus and others to deliver a holistic outreach service. A mobile unit now visits every two weeks and people can sign on, job search locally via contacts made with local employers, and receive advice on debt and benefits. A post graduate student from the University of Chichester has

been employed on a temporary basis via the Graduate On programme to help support the programme.

The project has been running since the beginning of February and has proved very successful, with over 70 people using the service and local employers registering vacancies. New services have been added to the original provision. For example, help with CV writing is now offered.

To date, the partners who have also joined AirS on the bus include:

- West Sussex Credit Union who offer ethical and competitive rates of interest on small loans, encouraging local people to start up savings accounts. Visit www.westsussexcreditunion.co.uk
- Citizens Advice Bureau who are interested in ensuring that rural communities have better access to their services
- Northbrook College who offer advice about returning to education and details on their full and part-time courses.

Other partners, including large employers, are currently being approached to work in partnership with AirS and JobCentre Plus to promote local employment opportunities in Storrington.

Other rural communities have shown an interest in the project and JobCentre Plus are keen to explore new locations across rural Sussex.

If you would like more information or wish to discuss future locations for the service, please contact Sarah Day, Access to Service Officer, on 07961 619746 or email Sarah.Day@ruralsussex.org.uk

Comment



Paul Mackie of the Storrington Community Partnership says of the current project: "The JobCentre Plus outreach has been a real success with over 100 people using the service; a mixture of job seekers and employers looking to place vacancies. The project has been of huge benefit to Storrington and we are seeking to continue the provision in the future. It has been an example of really good partnership working from our point of view and we are looking to further develop the number and range of services. I am sure that this type of project would be successful in other similar rural communities."

Hurst Green Community Shop and Drop-in Centre



Hurst Green used to have a variety of shops with a butcher, a grocer and a Post Office, but in more recent times these have vanished altogether. This has left Hurst Green with no shops and no central hub for activities and service delivery. Hurst Green has also seen an increase in the number of commuters over recent years and this with the lack of facilities in the village means that there is increasing social isolation.

In 2007, the Parish Council discussed whether the community should buy a disused church building which occupied a central place in the village.

The idea was to convert the Church into a community store and Post Office with a drop-in centre or 'community hub' for different members of the community to use. This would complement the activities of the existing village hall.



A meeting was arranged where local people identified the skills that they had to offer and a steering group was formed. Next, the feasibility of buying the property had to be investigated. The land owners were approached and agreed to support the project. Meanwhile, fundraising events were held in the village to garner support and further questionnaires were distributed to make sure that a village shop/community hub was what the village really wanted. The results of the consultation were very positive.

Hurst Green Community Store Committee has since applied for grants and has thus far been very successful with a

grant of £25,000 from Rother District Council and £40,000 from the Plunkett Foundation. Action in rural Sussex (AirS) also contributed with a Rural Access to Services Programme grant of £5,000 from South East England Development Agency funding.

The services which are planned to be delivered are a community shop, Post Office, drop-in centre for young people and senior people, internet access and a community cafe. It will also provide a secure medical pick-up point for prescriptions. The shop will be open seven days a week and the Steering Group will be looking for volunteers to help run all of the activities.

Parish Councillor Chris Greenfield says "My advice for other communities wishing to start a community shop would be to get as much information

"My advice for others wishing to start a community shop would be to get as much information as possible from people doing similar projects."

CLlr Chris Greenfield

from people who are already doing similar projects as possible; meet with them, see their shop, look at their books etc."



Further information is available on the Hurst Green website: www.hurstgreen.com

In the next edition of *Action* there will be a feature about Hurst Green and the services it provides for older people.

AirS commentary

AirS is delighted to be able to support Hurst Green and to be part of this project. It is a great example of a community seeing the potential of the assets it holds and coming together to deliver the services that it really needs. Hurst Green has been mindful of the needs of those who are most isolated or lacking facilities and services and is helping to provide specifically for them as well as for the community as a whole. Hurst Green is well on its way to achieving its original aims and is ensuring that it continues to develop community interest and support. This is crucial, especially as the success of the project in the future will in part rely on volunteers helping to run the services.

For more information contact Malindi Blight, Access to Services Officer, AirS on 07961 616442 or email Malindi.Blight@ruralsussex.org.uk