

Case Study: Reaching Communities: Village Action in Ticehurst.

Introduction: The Village Action in Ticehurst

Ticehurst is a village in the Rother district of East Sussex with a population of around 4000. It lies in the north east of the county and is closer to Tunbridge Wells in Kent, than to the towns of East Sussex. This is a beautiful and affluent looking village and many of the residents sing its praises. But as is often the case in rural Sussex, there are pockets of the community living in challenging circumstances and individuals who are isolated. AirS Village Agent began working in the village in 2018 (the 2nd year of the Reaching Communities project), following research by professionals in the area which identified deprivation comparable to inner city London. This combined with the location - far away from the main East Sussex service hubs - made it a strategic choice.

Basis for our work

AirS village agents use an asset based approach to community development. This means that we believe that communities know the best approaches that will meet their needs and the skills, and the motivation to develop services to meet them. Our role is to help identify and nurture those assets for the benefit of the community.

Tapping into assets.

Our first step was to map and identify the key groups, community members and volunteers in the area in order to understand what they cared about - what was motivating their actions. Those local activists & groups included....

- Ticehurst Community Friends good neighbour scheme who provide a car service to medical appointments, shopping and social occasions.
- Ticehurst Youth Group- A group popular with young people often living in challenging circumstances.
- Ticehurst Scouts – (beavers, clubs, scouts & rangers).
- Ticehurst News and Views- monthly community magazine.
- Ticehurst Lunch Club – weekly group lunch for the elderly.
- Ticehurst village centre project and family fun day (pictured)
- Ticehurst Children's Centre – run by East Sussex County Council with groups run by local volunteers.
- Ticehurst and Flimwell Primary school.
- Individual volunteers



Key themes from listening to the groups above

Two main themes arose from our conversations with members of the above groups. These areas are where they needed either:

1. More volunteers
2. More members and users.

Other groups that engaged less with our service such as the WI and the community library, seemed to need neither of the above. Some groups needed help with funding but this was lesser need than the above. Groups didn't want training but did ask for signposting to other services such as DBS services.

Turning points –



Ticehurst Community Challenge Volunteers week

Our AirS village agent in 2019 brought together groups who had identified the need for more volunteers to reflect on the benefits of volunteering for them, in order to use this to motivate others to volunteer. What became obvious was they found it difficult to connect to these feelings because they felt exhausted and in some cases trapped, with a number of key volunteers having more than one role. However as a result of the meeting groups decided to collaborate in running a volunteer recruitment event during national volunteers' week and with the support of the AirS village agent developed a strategy for engaging new volunteers.

Run by 14 volunteers , & supported by the village agent

50 people attended

22 new volunteers signed up

A natural network of groups formed

Developing support for those in food

poverty.

In Autumn 2019 key local people learnt that a Ticehurst resident had borrowed a car to attend the foodbank in Hastings – a distance of 35 miles. There was discussion about setting up a foodbank in Ticehurst which would have needed 6 volunteers on a weekly basis to collect and deliver food. The AirS village agent (V.A.) discovered that Nourish foodbank in Tunbridge Wells had occasionally delivered in the village. The V.A. was able to get the foodbank manager to attend a meeting with local volunteers, parish councillors and the school. Outcomes from this meeting were that rather than create a new foodbank, they promote Nourish in the village, increase referral agencies and involve the community in donating food. This would enable residents to get a confidential service with a clear referral route and reduce the need for local volunteers

This experience highlighted the needs of local residents within the community and inspired the community to collaborate more with local services such as the school.

What we have learnt.

1, Some people seemed to be uncomfortable attending services with other communities. For example the youth group is a thriving group but has evolved to include young people almost exclusively from one community. They subtly exclude children from other communities. And a free parent and toddler group was not attended by families from a nearby estate, despite the lead volunteer coming from the estate, and parents walking past the venue on their way to the local school. It's possible that they did not like the style of the session, did not see a benefit or felt uncomfortable with parents that seemed more affluent. But when referred, these local parents did attend and enjoy sessions, to learn about health and nutrition, if a crèche was provided.

2, Our Airs village agent was somewhat surprised to find that there was little or no communication between services and local community groups. Age UK social prescribers are bridging the gap for the elder age group and patient participation groups provide some links but when she began working in the village, there was no communication between services for children and families and local groups. The village agent was able to rectify this by providing opportunities for connection and 'oiling' those relationships when they became a bit stuck. Those relationships are now a lot more collaborative and sustainable enabling local families to access services more easily.

3 Working intensively in one area at a time gives good opportunities to reach the community.

Group development - Focus on Ticehurst Community Friends

Ticehurst Community Friends (TCF) started in 2014 with the support of AirS partner Rother Voluntary Action. It is volunteer run and provides a variety of support services from befriending to computer help and form filling. However most requests fulfilled are for driving to medical appointments, shopping or social visits.

These successes in the last 2 years were identified by the lead volunteers:

- TCF has raised its profile & increased its volunteers
- Provides monthly updates onto several social media platforms
- Expanded its role:
 - * Liaised with Nourish the local Food Bank, creating a collection point in the village
 - * Worked with the GP surgery on social prescribing initiatives.
 - * Created a link and support for older people with a local Care Home, drove them to afternoon tea and activities
 - * Established a hearing aid maintenance surgery



As a robust existing group, with strong management & outreach,

TCF was in a perfect position to respond to the Covid pandemic in March 2020.

- * TCF rapidly created a new Covid-19 volunteer group with clear guidance.
- * Supported the vulnerable with shopping, newspapers, vegetables & prescriptions.
- * Supported those in financial hardship with food distribution
- * Established Covid-19 protocols & guidelines, and purchased PPE for drivers to be able to return to driving clients to medical appointments

Ticehurst is now a more resilient community, able to face the challenges of Covid and unknown challenges to come, with a strong foundation of energy and volunteers.

Feedback on support from the Village Agent.

"The village agent has always been very supportive, is available to discuss any problems or help seek solutions, she provides a useful link with other agencies offering similar services and with her enthusiastic support nudges or encourages us forward to do more in our local community".

Written by Village Agent Karen Laver, December 2020