

Healthy Lives – Resilient Communities



What is the volunteering potential in communities?

How can this be realised? What is required?

Volunteering potential



Shropshire currently has levels of community capacity and involvement, social action and volunteering that other places would be delighted to have. Many of the Healthy Lives programmes – particularly Resilient Communities and Social Prescribing are reliant on the activity of individuals within communities or community groups/voluntary organisations for their success. This situation is threatened by a number of factors – changes to Shropshire’s demographics – an increasingly older population that relies on a culture of elderly people looking after other elderly people, changes to society, which could mean that the capacity people currently have in retirement to volunteer and be active in their communities could diminish, and a lack of financial investment in infrastructure support for the voluntary and community sector, which could result in organisations and charities being less robust, resilient and adaptable to cope with change and new ways of working.

Asset based community development (ABCD)



Shropshire has an ABCD approach to building community capacity and supporting social action and volunteering. ABCD principles are -

- Community led – what can people do for themselves? What do people need some help to achieve? What do people need others to do for them?
- Relationship orientated – how much more can we achieve when we work together?
- Asset based – what's strong and what's wrong? Using the strengths of individuals and communities allows the things that are wrong to be tackled
- Place based – working at the level of a neighbourhood, village or small town feels manageable when people want to make a difference
- Inclusion focused – communities that welcome 'strangers' and their assets

Resilient Communities (RC)



RC is the community capacity building programme delivered by the Community Enablement Team in partnership with local communities. Its activity is the foundation for Healthy Lives programmes that rely on the involvement of communities for their success. RC activity –

Creation of hyper local directories of local activity and services

Creation of Community Connector networks

Putting local governance arrangements in place for local activity to report to where this is needed, e.g. Health & Being Forums, steering groups

Identifying the gaps in community activity where there is unmet need and supporting the community to work together to fill those gaps

Being part of other programme teams, e.g. local social prescribing teams

Community based activity



The huge majority of community activity – organised by local people for other local people will benefit our mental, emotional and physical health and help people to feel they are socially connected. However, this type of activity would probably not be described in this way and the wellbeing benefits seen as secondary to the main purpose of the activity. Often the organisers would not see themselves as volunteers or delivering social action – they’re just doing something in their community with their neighbours. Councils can play a role in enabling this activity in a number of ways – through ensuring that community assets are maintained and accessible, providing good quality information and advice about communities, providing community development advice and small amounts of funding and ensuring that there is effective local governance that enables people to feel part of how their place is run and the decisions that are made about its future.

Voluntary groups and volunteers



Shropshire is fortunate to have a strong and effective strategic voluntary and community sector assembly (VCSA) that represents the diverse range of voluntary groups active in the county. The VCSA has recently published research into the role of the voluntary sector in delivering 'preventative' activity – often delivered by volunteers - that supports people to stay away from expensive services and interventions.

<http://vcsvoice.org/2017/10/vcs-assembly-publishes-prevention-research/>

County wide and local voluntary groups and volunteers are playing a key role in the delivery of Shropshire's social prescribing model, as many of the interventions that people are referred or signposted to are voluntary. The council's ASC Let's Talk Local teams, and the GP based Community & Care Co-ordinators are equally reliant on these groups and their activities.

The challenge of traditional volunteering



There is a need for new approaches and a cultural change to support social action and volunteering that complements changes to both society and the delivery of public sector services. People – particularly in new communities – may lack the confidence to be ‘neighbourly’ towards individuals who would welcome low levels of support, or do small acts in their neighbourhood that make a difference. People are more likely these days to think that this is ‘someone else’s job’. In addition, traditional approaches to volunteering that suit people who are ‘time rich’, don’t work with the modern lifestyles of younger people who are ‘time poor’ and not able to offer time and energy to others on an organised or regular basis. Working together to rebuild a culture of neighbourliness and to find ways for people to give their time in ways that suits their lifestyles would unlock new social action and build the capacity of communities to do things that support well-being, health, social connectedness and independence.

Innovation that will unlock resilience and capacity



The council is developing and testing a number of innovative approaches that will build the resilience and capacity of individuals and communities. The serious concerns about the sustainability of current delivery models of social care and health services as a result of increased demand and falling budgets are driving the need for new ways of doing things that will involve us doing more for ourselves and for our community to maintain our health and independence.

The Tribe Project is being piloted in Oswestry with officers, community groups and volunteers testing a digital social action platform to create and respond to volunteer 'jobs' in the locality – essentially connecting up people who have a need with someone who can help, and vice-versa. Tribe, as a technology has the ability to strategically map 'need' which would inform the current and future needs of service delivery or community activity.

Summary of volunteering potential to support wellbeing



Shropshire has a range of strong assets that support and enable social action and volunteering across the county

Our current position could be threatened by a number of factors – changing demographics, changes to society and our lifestyles, a reduction in financial support for sector infrastructure and a sometimes uncertain future for the community assets that bring people together

There are a number of innovative ideas being explored and tested for new ways of working and changing the culture in which services are delivered and received.