

Carers Local Centres, Uckfield and Hastings, 2023 Report

What the funding has helped us achieve

2023 has proved to be an incredibly busy and successful year for our local centres. Reflecting back on what we sought to achieve through the project, it is clear that we have already made great progress in embedding the centres in their local communities, meeting the needs of local carers and in beginning to reach new and underrepresented groups of carers. There is, however, still much to do, both in this final year of the funding and in helping to ensure that this vital work continues beyond the scope of this initial funding award.

With over 250 carers having now accessed services at the local centres since they opened, it is true that the reach has been good, but it is the individual stories of impact that truly show the benefits of having the local centres for carers. In this report we have included four short cases studies to illustrate this impact and the voices of local carers, we also present details of the wide range of carer support and activities on offer, as well as set out 'the story' of our project this year. We look in depth at what we have learned and what we have changed as a result.



Local carers centres

Our local carers centres are beginning to make a real difference to the lives of carers, providing visible and localised services, helping to reach more hidden carers and raising awareness of the role of carers in their communities.

Working with partner organisations has been crucial, along with consulting with local carers to co-design services at every stage.

Our Uckfield local centre is at the Victoria Support Pavilion, co-located with Sussex Support Service. In Hastings we are based at the Isabel Blackman Centre (IBC), a leisure and wellbeing centre for the over 50s, run by Age UK East Sussex.

A 'typical' month at a local centre can include.. Carers drop-in for coffee morning, 1:1 Carers Clinics, Time to Talk counselling sessions and carer activities such as mindfulness, arts and crafts and walks. In addition the two centres offer:

UCKFIELD

- ✓ Carers Information and Advice group
- ✓ Severe Mental Health Carers support group
- ✓ Carers O' Clock provided by Culture Shift
- ✓ AMAZE parent-carer support group

HASTINGS

- ✓ Adfam Carers Clinics
- ✓ Free social memberships for the IBC
- ✓ Carers Activity and Wellbeing passes

The local centres provide carer inclusive spaces, large enough for carers to spend time together, taking part in a variety of activities, closer to home, reducing barriers, such as cost, time and travel.

Development of our local centres has been made possible through funding generously provided by the National Lottery Community Fund.

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As featured in Care for the Carers Annual Report 22-23.

1. At a Glance - Uckfield Local Carers Centre at the Victoria Pavilion

Since the Uckfield Local Carers Centre first opened its doors during Carers Week in June 2022, it has become a focal point for carers in Uckfield and the surrounding communities and the centre goes from strength-to-strength. Co-located at the Victoria Pavilion with Sussex Support Services, the centre offers services for carers of all ages, and in a variety of caring situations. This continues to work well as a hub for the northern part of the county, due to its accessibility from other nearby towns and villages, and the concentration of carers in and around those towns.

The space was tried and tested by a Sussex Support Services, a local charity, and gained excellent reputation, this has meant that other organisations which provide support to carers have responded positively to our invitation and we now have a comprehensive offer of activities for carers from a number of charities, and those run by carers themselves, all in one location. Many of these have been partners from East Sussex VCS Carers Network, but increasingly we are working with a wider range of organisations, for example the Adult College for Rural East Sussex. Margaret Dode-Angel, the founder and CEO of Sussex Support Services continues to act as a conduit for our work in the Uckfield area, opening many new doors to us. Her work and that of the Sussex Support Services was justly rewarded at the Care for the Carers AGM in November 2023, when they were presented with the inaugural 'Exceptional Partnership to Support Carers' award.



Offer for carers in Uckfield including mindfulness and meditation, coffee drop-in and carers groups.

Local carers voices

“The Victoria Pavilion has become like a second home to me! There is so much going on here for us carers. I come to the Carers O’ Clock arts group, Carers Group and the Amaze group for parent carers as well. I feel so fortunate that there is so much going on in Uckfield on my doorstep to meet my needs as a carer”.

Uckfield carer of an adult with Dementia and a young person on the Autism Spectrum.

Physical space for local carers services in Uckfield, available thanks to the Lottery funding

- Large office/client facing space/ training room - 5 days a week
- Exclusive use of the entire centre – large main hall and break out room (available for small group or confidential work) on Tuesdays and Thursdays
- Use of the outside space in the Victoria Gardens, adjacent to the Pavilion

2. At a Glance -Hastings Local Carers Centre at Isabel Blackman Centre

In Hastings, our Local Carers Centre at the Isabel Blackman Centre (IBC) has proved to be a warm and welcoming environment for carers, particularly older carers, due to the nature of the space as a leisure and wellbeing facility for the over 50s, with fully accessible exercise and classes space, community café and a programme of social activities. We have made full use of these superb and recently refurbished facilities to support local carers, building on the best the centre has to offer. In June 2023 the Isabel Blackman Centre was recognised as the first Carer Friendly setting in East Sussex, as part of Care for the Carers revised ‘Carer Friendly’ scheme, due to their work with us and commitment to supporting carers.

MAKING CARERS COUNT **COMMUNITY FUND** **Carers Activities**

Celebrating Unpaid Carers Celebrating Diversity

Saturday 10th June 11am to 2pm

Do you look after someone who couldn't manage without your help?

You are invited to join us and our local partners for a **free event - please drop in!** We are welcoming carers from across the communities.

Relax, enjoy tasty food, relaxing treats, meet other carers and find out more about us, our partners and the Isabel Blackman Centre.

care for the carers East Sussex

Tel: 01323 735599 Email: info@cfcc.org.uk

TEXT: 07840 077500 www.cfcc.org.uk



Carers Activity and Wellbeing Passes

- Are you over 50 and an unpaid carer living in Hastings or the surrounding area registered with Care for the Carers?
- Do you struggle to find the time and place to be active or connect with others?

We have FREE 6 month passes that will offer access to the gym and any classes you choose at the Isabel Blackman Centre (IBC Active memberships)

All that we ask in return is that you complete a short questionnaire at the beginning and end of your membership and that you take part in an induction with the Fitness Instructor at the centre before using the gym or attending physical activity classes.



Offer for carers in Hastings, incl. a Sound Bath workshop, Carers Activity and Wellbeing Passes and the Counselling space.

Local carers voices

"I have been able to do classes I used to do many years ago and loved. Before I started I was in a lot of pain in my knees. Now it is rare and I feel energized. I have made friends and had many snacks and some meals in their lovely café".

Carer who benefitted from the free Carers Activity and Wellbeing Pass at the Hastings Centre.

Physical space for local carers services in Hastings, available thanks to the Lottery funding

- Multi-purpose confidential space ('The Stade' room) for one to one or small group work
- Small office room for 1 or 2 members of staff
- Weekly use of an additional counselling room
- Regular bookings for a large room for activities and carers groups
- Use of the space in the community café
- Access to a small community garden at the front of the centre
- Gallery wall (we used this to exhibit "Seeing carers: A carers' photography project" in Spring/ Summer 2023)

3. How we're involving the local community

Carers voices have been central throughout the development of this project; we regularly consult carers, and have included their feedback to help co-design new local services, provided for free or at a low cost at both centres. Having a physical space for carers continues to be incredibly important to them, as many have shared that they continue to feel lonely and isolated and are experiencing the full and unwanted force of the current cost of living crisis. Our Annual Carers Survey, as captured in the [2023 East Sussex Carers Voices Report](#), shows that 94% of carers in East Sussex feel alone and isolated, and 96% talk about their wellbeing being affected as a result of caring role, with 83% of carers reporting being affected financially as a result of their caring role.

Building social connections, in a safe space, accessible and cost free is a priority. Local carers are also in desperate need of respite and a break from their caring role (42% of carers want to, but can't access respite, [2023 East Sussex Carers Voices Report](#)), more so than ever as statutory services come under increasing pressures.

Our local centres provide spaces large enough for carers to spend time together, taking part in a variety of activities of their choosing. Through partnership working at the Victoria Pavilion, there is also an opportunity for carers to bring the person they care for to receive separate support at the same time, so arranging replacement care is not a barrier to accessing support, which so often is a case. 12 carers benefitted from reciprocal care provided by Sussex Support Services this year. At the Isabel Blackman Centre there are many opportunities to take a break from caring, or to join in shared activities, to have a drink or a meal with the person they are looking after, which for some carers is also welcomed.

Our Communities Team Leader regularly visits existing carers groups as well as other local community groups to gather carer's ideas for future services and activities. This has led to new groups starting up, for example the PDA Sense Group for parent-carers, as well as one-off taster sessions and short courses for carers, including music workshops and Breath Work in Uckfield. Our Hastings local centre provides a space for carers being supported by Care for the Carers' Hastings Primary Care Project, to access activities and more in-depth targeted support, outside the GP surgery. This has included a Sound Bath workshop, mindfulness, relaxation and benefits outreach session provided by our partners from Hastings Representation and Advice Centre (HARC). In

Uckfield carers support and services have reached beyond the physical space and time available, due to the high levels of carer interest and demand, to include more evening and weekend opportunities and have included an evening wreath making workshop and a weekly 'Saturday Social' offered by Sussex Support Service.

In our last report we reflected that we needed to develop better ways of capturing carer's experiences of the space and of what's on offer through simpler feedback systems in the centres themselves. Gathering regular informal feedback from carers through discussion rather than questionnaires and more formal approaches have worked well this year as this hasn't been too intrusive or time consuming for carers, as after all, this isn't the main reason for them making use of the spaces and their respite time is especially precious. As part of our Carers Week celebration event in Hastings we trialled a 'Table Cloth Survey' which proved an engaging way to involve carers in shaping future services. These involved carers writing their ideas on a large pieces of material, opening a discussion with others and the Care for the Carers staff. Carers from the local centre areas also contribute to our Annual Carers Voices Survey, the results of which provides direction and impetus for all that we do - see [2023 East Sussex Carers Voices Report](#).

We have continued to attract local decision makers to visit our new centres, encouraging them to support our work and help raise the profile of family and informal caring. Nusrat Ghani, MP for Wealden and Minister of State at the Department for Business and Trade has been incredibly supportive since visiting our local centre in Uckfield, examples of this include her support for our Carers Week campaign <https://www.nusghani.org.uk/news/welfare-carers-often-overlooked> and article in Hailsham Eye reaching 8000 households in Wealden.

Uckfield Town Council also support us through invites to local events and through their communications with local residents, as do Hastings Borough Council. Following her visit to the Isabel Blackman Centre for our Carers Week event, Hastings and Rye MP, Sally-Ann Hart, spoke at the Prime Minister Questions thanking local carers for all that they do and congratulating two local charities on receiving Carer Friendly status. This has provided a great deal of national publicity for carers and allowed us to remain engaged with the MP, now working on a Parliamentary visit and a debate.

Nusrat Ghani MP visit

On 9th December 2022, we welcomed Nusrat Ghani, MP for Wealden and Minister of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to our Local Carers Centre in Uckfield. Nusrat's visit was timely as that same week we had celebrated over 100 local carers accessing support services through the centre.



Nusrat commented: "The wellbeing of carers is all too often forgotten, so I am delighted to see this fantastic new facility for carers in Uckfield, offering easily accessible, local services and spreading the word of the help available."

Nusrat had a tour of the centre, met staff and found out more about the services on offer, including drop-in sessions, advice and support groups, counselling sessions, workshops and activities. To find out more about our local centre, call our Carers Hub on [01323 738390](tel:01323738390) or visit www.cftc.org.uk.

As featured in the [Careline Magazine](#).



4. The differences we are making

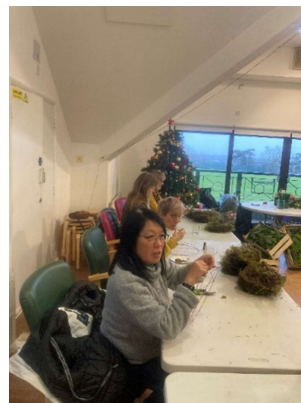
A key aspect of how we are using our funding is to finance key staff roles for the local centres. These staff members have provided clear strategic leadership to establish our presence in Uckfield and Hastings and to ensure that all is in place and operating well day-to-day in the local centres. Their relationship building with partners and on-going work on the ground in the two areas has been critical in getting the centres established and making them successful.

4.1. Uckfield

Uckfield Local Centre - carers activities and services offered in 2023
Uckfield Carers Information and Advice Group , a monthly group with an introduction of reciprocal care available from Sussex Support Services. This allows carers to attend the group with other peers, take time out from the caring role while the cared for person is safe and have their needs met. Since the opening of the local centre, attendance at this group more than doubled. Over the past year, between 9 and 15 carers have regularly attended each month.
Specialist Carers Counselling with 3 carers attending each week.
Monthly Carers drop-in a friendly chat, information and a cup of coffee. Numbers vary, but 14 carers have directly benefitted from the drop-in this year.
1:1 Carers Clinic , monthly, started in the middle of the year, 9 carers have attended appointments this year.
Mental Health Carers Group , monthly, currently attended by between 8 and 12 carers.
Support group for Parent-Carers (run by Amaze), with between 7 and 16 parent-carers attending each month.
PDA Sense group for parent-carers , (run by a local carer), started in November with 8 parent-carers attending.
Carers O' Clock (run by Culture Shift) monthly sessions allowing carers to come together and focus on their own wellbeing, with artist led creative activities and freshly cooked lunch. Average attendances are between 8 and 16 carers.
Monthly Young Carers group and holiday activities . 5 to 10 young carers attending the monthly club, holiday activities attended by 6 to 11 carers.
Mindfulness course , a block of 6 weekly sessions took place in January and February 2023, accessed by 15 carers.
Wellness Recovery Action Planning courses (run by Coastal Wellbeing), with reciprocal care provided by Sussex Supports Service. 5 carers attended the most recent course.
DISC Dementia Support Course took place in Summer 2023 with 6 carers taking part.
Carers Cooking taster session (run by Community Chef, in partnership with Diversity Resource International) for ethnically diverse carers, February 2023, attended by 7 ethnically diverse carers.

Carers focus groups – carers voices sessions with a friendly cuppa and cake. January 2023 - with 15 carers. Two more focus groups were scheduled in the autumn but had to move on-line due to severe weather.

Social and wellbeing activities for carers, including Community Chef taster session (2 carers), music workshop (4 carers), pampering sessions (4 carers), Breath Work (9 carers), wreath making (18 carers) and Christmas lunch (16 carers).



Carers Wreath Making workshop in Uckfield, December 2023.

Where we work with partner organisations, they support us by contributing to the room hire costs, with reduced rates to use the rooms for carer support activities, and for East Sussex VCS Carers Network members. We are also able to allow local groups to try out activities for carers for free, before they are fully funded, or as part of their fundraising effort (which is almost impossible to do anywhere else, due to lack of free venues in the area). This has been the case for the new carer-led PDA Sense group, as well as now fully funded Carers O’Clock. We are able to support local groups to leverage funding opportunities, by providing this element of in kind ‘matched’ funding. This is also a rare opportunity for charities to try out activities, to best understand what works and is wanted by carers; as well as offering opportunity for peer support groups to develop.

Case study 1: ‘I knew it was time’

Mary cares for her husband Derek, who was diagnosed with dementia 18 months ago. Alongside this diagnosis Derek also has arthritis and had a foot operation which impacts his mobility. Mary has her own health issues, as she has a pacemaker.

Mary had been attending the local ‘Know Dementia’ Café at the nearby Civic Centre, and over time decided to seek more support for herself as a carer. She attended one of our Local Centre Drop-In sessions, in September, as she said she “*knew it was time*”. This is because while she has some support from friends and her church, it is mainly just her and her husband.

At the drop in, we discussed what support was available to Mary and her husband Derek, this included: the dementia course run by our partner DISC, monthly carers group, and the fact that Mary could access free replacement care for Derek at the same time, delivered by Sussex Support Services to be able to attend. We arranged for a Carer Support Worker to call Mary and discuss these services in more detail. We supported the carer to complete an emergency plan with the Carer's Respite Emergency Support Scheme (CRESS) to ensure that short-term support can be put in place in an emergency.

At the same time Mary was able to access further information on what was available for Derek, via Sussex Support Services - this included the Arts group and the Saturday Café, which Mary

could attend with Derek. The Sussex Support were also able to support her to find a suitable local podiatrist for her husband.

By attending the drop-in clinic Mary was able to learn about a range of support available for her, and her husband, all in one place. She could meet staff from both Care for the Carers and Sussex Support Services, who were able to answer any questions she had, and reduce anxiety she may have been feeling about reaching out and accessing support.

Young Carers

We have been successfully running activities for Young Carers at our Uckfield Local Carers Centre for 15 months now. We have learnt that finding a suitable venue to host a larger group of young people, which offers an attractive space to have fun and be active, can be a challenge. Victoria Pavilion offered a strong solution allowing us to start the new group in the area, with plenty of outdoor open space and indoor games, as well as quiet spaces and communal cooking facilities. We are now registering more interest from families in the area where Young Carers are unable to travel to Eastbourne, where the club has exclusively run from before our centre opened.



Young carers activities (sushi cooking class, monthly club, first aid session and summer activity – mask making).

4.2. Hastings

We work closely with our partner Age UK East Sussex to offer a range of support and activities from the Isabel Blackman Centre. For example, through funding our partner charity received we have been able to offer free lunches for carers. They have also generously provided free social memberships for carers as part of our Carers Card discount scheme. With additional funding provided by Care for the Carers we started a programme in September 2023 which will provide 50 free gym and class memberships at the centre.

The Isabel Blackman Centre NEW!

Winding Street, Hastings, TN34 3AT

Tel: [01424 235535](tel:01424235535) Email: ibc@ageukeastsussex.org.uk

Website: www.isabelblackmancentre.co.uk

The Isabel Blackman Centre is a wellbeing and leisure centre for the over 50's. Featuring a lovely café with homemade, affordable meals, activity classes, cinema club, events and dances it's a place for everyone to enjoy. Upstairs we have a new state of the art exercise studio and gym which is for the over 50's only. We are open Monday to Friday 8am – 4pm so pop in at any time and become a member for unlimited access too.

Bring your Carers Card to the Isabel Blackman Centre and **we will give you a years' Social Membership FOR FREE. This entitles you to 10% off all food and drinks in the café, £1 off any class or activity every time you visit.**

As featured in the Careline Magazine.

Hastings Local Centre - carers activities and services offered in 2023
Monthly Carers drop-in for a friendly chat, information and a cup of coffee, started in March 23 with 11 carers attending so far.
1 to 1 Carers clinics , 15 carers supported in 2023.
Specialist Carers Counselling started in March 2023, with 3 carers attending each week. Due to demand, an additional weekly morning was added in June 2023, providing the opportunity for a further 3 carers to benefit with a second counsellor every week.
Mental Health Carers Group summer meet up, local walk with the refreshments at the café in May, with 6 carers attending and in August with 5 carers.
1 to 1 Carers Clinics (Adfam) supporting carers of people with substance misuse issues, twice a month with up to 6 carers being seen each time. This has increased from initially once a month due to demand.
Social and wellbeing activities for carers , including Community Chef taster session (January 23, 2 carers), mindfulness (5 carers), pampering sessions (4 carers), Sound Bath (4 carers), HARC benefits advice (6 carers), Christmas lunch (18 carers).
Association of Carers , one of our partner organisations, regularly meets carers in the community café and makes use of rooms at the centre.
Carers Activity and Wellbeing Passes 50 fully-funded Carers Wellbeing and Activity Passes for carers at the Isabel Blackman Centre – 17 taken up so far in the first 3 months.
Free lunches for carers , 16 accessed so far.
Free Carers Social Memberships , 23 carers have these, providing £1 off classes and 10% off in the café.

In early 2023 our staff worked with committee members from the Hastings and Rother Rainbow Alliance (HRRRA) to develop support for LGBT carers, as part of the local carers centre offer. A regular support group for 50+ LGBT members started in March, taking place in the cafe. Although this is not aimed directly at carers, recognition and support for carers has been a key aspect through peer support and Care for the Carers staff involvement as appropriate.

For Carers Week and the following two months we were able to display “Seeing carers: A carers’ photography project” using the gallery wall in the cafe, leading to lots of conversations around the photographs and caring more generally.

Case study 2: ‘It’s been my total lifeline’

Sally, a local Hastings carer who looks after her husband and son who both have complex health needs, started making use of the gym and activity classes at the Isabel Blackman Centre through one of our fully funded Carers Activity and Wellbeing Passes (starting in September 2023).

At first, this was very much as and when Sally could spare the short blocks of time away from her demanding caring roles. After a few weeks she found she was able to commit a little more time and started attending twice a week, telling herself “*This is something for me*”. She shared that she would like to add more classes and social events as there is so much on offer, but knows that this very much depends on her caring responsibilities at home.

“It’s been my total lifeline from caring for my husband and son. I have met lovely people there and I enjoy the wonderful food, coffee and a chat after my classes. I can’t imagine how life would be without the centre to attend”.

5. What we’ve learned

Care for the Carers services are continuing to see unprecedented levels of demand, especially the Carers Hub, which provides information, support and guidance to carers. Not only that, but our staff are finding that more and more carers are presenting with increasingly complex needs and at a point of crisis and a break down. This means that to support carers better, we need to reach out to them as early as possible, we need to ensure carers know about us, where we are and feel comfortable speaking to us sooner. Our local centres have had a key part to play in helping us to achieve this and in making us highly visible in the local communities.

As the project develops, we are increasingly honing our work in each area more and more to best support local carers. This does continue to look quite different at times due to the demographics of the two areas. For instance, in Hastings our local offer prioritises more intensive 1:1 support through our targeted projects, whereas more universal and partner-led services continue to generally be suitable and successful in Uckfield, although we know that we need to respond flexibly to individual circumstances as well.

Our offer continues to be guided by local changes as needed and in consultation with partners and local carers. As we are now established in the Uckfield community, we started to receive interest from businesses and organisations wanting to support us. A small example of this was in November when the Uckfield Bonfire Society donated £100 of money they raised towards the work of the local centre. Whereas we have experienced how saturated Hastings is with regards to services and organisations, how difficult it is to be seen and yet how complex it is to find affordable spaces to run a variety of activities from one place. Through our work with Hastings Voluntary Action and other local partners like Xtrax we are seeking to address this, including making sure that we reach Young Adult Carers (aged 16-25) and working carers who may be put off by us being based in an over 50s leisure centre.

Case study 3: Local carer empowered to start and lead their own carer's support group in Uckfield.

Barry attended the Uckfield Carers Group since October 2022. He is balancing being self-employed with caring for his disabled wife and daughter who has additional needs. He talked about his work as a trainer for the Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) Society. We linked him in with the lead for the Amaze parent-carer group at the Victoria Pavilion and he gave a presentation to 15 carers there about PDA (January 2023).

We stayed in touch with Barry over the next few months, particularly as his caring situation had become difficult. Even though things were difficult, Barry was keen to offer more PDA support to others in his circumstances. We worked with Barry to help him develop an idea he had about peer support meetings and offered initial support with rent free room, as a result his group started in November. The first meeting was attended by 8 carers, with 2 having travelled from Wadhurst to be there.

In order to help him establish the group we were able to provide the room as a gift in kind for the first six months. Through empowering this local carer to set-up a group this has opened up new support options for parent carers in the area and shows the potential of the centre and its staff in brokering support and enabling new innovative groups for carers to come alive. All alongside supporting Barry to do something for others, utilising his skills, experience and passion. A real asset based community development in action.

Case study 4: Celebrating Carers, Celebrating Diversity – Carers Week event at the Isabel Blackman Centre, Hastings.

On Saturday 10th June, Care for The Carers held its final event for Carers Week 2023 at the local carers Centre, at the Isabel Blackman. The aim of **Celebrating Unpaid Carers: Celebrating Diversity** was to create a relaxing, welcoming environment with an emphasis on celebration whilst at the same time acknowledging that anyone of any culture or ethnicity, could be a carer. We were joined by 24 carers, including 8 from diverse communities including Polish, African Caribbean and Bolivian. We also had 20 professionals join us, some of whom were also carers.

The entrance to the building was decked with international flags that flowed into the Centre where people were greeted with international music. An informal advice lounge was created in the café area for visiting carers to find out how local organisations can offer them support. This included Care for the Carers and the Association of Carers, along with Eden Project Communities, Healing Breath and Together South. In the Mindful Arts Lounge, the Drawing Life and Aoi Bara were offering creative ways to find relaxation through drawing and origami.

The opening speeches from distinguished guests included awarding two 'Carer Friendly' certificates in recognition by Care for the Carers of the achievements of venues that are mindful of the needs of carers. The awardees were The Isabel Blackman Centre and Hastings Voluntary Action.

The programme of activities included participants being invited into gentle warm up exercises and a taster drawing session, a lesson in Chi Kung proving gentle exercise good for the body and mind, concluded with mediational breathing. All session were provided by local small businesses and wellbeing facilitators.

Fitting for this event, a fantastic menu of treats from around the world was designed and cooked by Portia, chef at the Isabel Blackman Centre.

The event included inspiring speeches from Jennifer Twist, Care for the Carers Chief Executive. Lady Mayor, Councillor Margi O'Callaghan, Sally-Ann Hart, MP and Linda Seddon a local black carer and carers voices advocate. Speakers have shared their understanding through personal experience of the difficulties unpaid carers are faced with and the herculean effort that many put in every day to look after someone who cannot manage without their support. It was again acknowledged that carers come in all shapes, sizes and ages and that caring can include anything from helping with the chores for family, friends or neighbours to giving full time care to a relative, friend or partner. It was also acknowledged that carers are not sufficiently recognised or validated for the voluntary work that they do, and, in the bigger picture, that their work helps to support our economy and other public services in the UK.

The event resulted in a stronger relationship with the local MP, mention in the Prime Minister Questions and an attractive press release in the local media.



Dean Stewart from the Isabel Blackman Centre and Jan Caley with Steve Manwaring from Hastings Voluntary Action receiving their Carer Friendly awards from Lady Mayor, Councillor Margi O'Callaghan and Sally-Ann Hart, MP.

6. How we're changing what we do

In the relatively short time that our centres have been running we have been open to making changes, refining and improving what we do and how it is done. Where this has involved making physical changes to our working and carer support environments to achieve the best outcomes, we've embraced it. In Uckfield this has necessitated further soundproofing works to reflect the variety of services happening and in Hastings it has meant transferring more carer activities to our upstairs office/multi room which was previously set aside as a working area for staff.

In terms of clear internal communication and establishing and maintaining positive working relationships with our two main partners, we have found that it is fundamental to keep investing time and effort in this to keep the partnerships healthy and to make sure everyone is up-to-date with what is happening. For instance, the Communities Team Leader keeps the Care for the Carers team updated through monthly bulletins including a 'what's on' chart for each centre, designed in ways that Carers Support Workers can easily share relevant information with carers, as they deliver 1 to 1 work to carers from those areas. He also makes every effort to keep colleagues updated, so that we can balance the working environments for staff with services for carers. This does require negotiation and flexibility, particularly as the centres become busier and busier and hybrid working patterns become established for our staff. Uckfield Centre became so busy with group activities and clinics for carers, that we are now prioritising client work there. Investment made in soundproofing

one of the rooms, means we can now run more activities at the same time and created flexible working spaces allowing our outreach staff to have a base when needed.

In Hastings, we can access different rooms at IBC, including the treatment room. This will offer us an opportunity to pilot wellbeing treatments for carers in early 2024. This would offer a break from caring, which is so sought after, and access to relaxing session which carers often can't prioritise, particularly in Hastings where carers face the most severe financial difficulties.

As new staff are recruited to our team or to those of Sussex Support Services or Age UK East Sussex, we have again found that extra care and time has been needed to get to know each other, show sensitivity and to make the most of changing dynamics. But all this results in much higher carer awareness, better signposting and crucially more available for carers (examples of thins include extension of reciprocal care provided in Uckfield and free lunches for carers in financial difficulty in Hastings).

It would be fair to say at this point that the local centres are putting down good 'roots' in each locality through linking with key partners, for example through becoming members of the Chamber of Commerce in Uckfield and becoming increasingly active with established and evolving networks in Hastings like the Men's Health and Wellbeing Forum, Hastings Ageing Network and Hastings Community Response Network. But it will take more time and continued efforts to ensure that these roots are strong enough to sustain the centres for the longer term. Whilst we now have a range of services on offer at the local centres, we'll need to continue to evaluate how these are going, look to see if they are meeting the needs of local carers and be adaptable enough to develop services and try new things in response to what carers are telling us and any emerging themes from our Carers Voices Network and Carers VCS Network partners.

We plan to build on the new relationship with local businesses with Employers for Carers event co-organised with the Chamber of Commerce in Uckfield (Winter 2024), and we hope to build long term support base with those in the local business community. We are making plans to host the annual Wellbeing & Diversity Carers Event in Uckfield, and applied for additional funding to deliver a large event to a local funder.

As we look ahead to 2024, we will put in place steps so that the work the centres do is fully rooted, continues and grows so that it keeps making a difference for carers and to secure further funding beyond the end of 2024, so that this work can flourish and benefit carers for many more years to come.



Carers artwork made during an event in the Hastings Centre and the Care for the Carers team supporting one of the events there.