



2023

**ANNUAL
REVIEW**



We work with and for communities and believe that County Durham is a better place for having thriving community organisations.

We run Durham Community Action (DCA) well, so that we can support community organisations by:

- Providing expertise and advice that is tailored to their needs and circumstances.
- Supporting and nurturing new community initiatives.
- Enabling good volunteering practice and opportunities.
- Representing and providing a voice for the voluntary and community sector (VCSE) in County Durham.

What we value

Objectivity, honesty, and integrity

Doing the right thing

Setting high standards for the sector

Encouraging a can-do culture

Accountability and responsibility

Professional pride

Enabling leadership

Learning the lessons and sharing them

Listening and reflecting

Analysis and problem solving

What we are doing

Providing expertise and advice

We support community organisations to do their work effectively, by providing advice, training, resources, and help to tackle challenges, and to realise their aspirations.

Supporting new initiatives

We work with networks and communities of interest to track opportunities and challenges for the sector, and to innovate and test new approaches that strengthen our social and community infrastructure.

Enabling good volunteering

We provide brokerage and resources to develop volunteering opportunities and good practice in volunteer involving organisations. We champion volunteering across all sectors in County Durham, and support people who are new to volunteering to find the right opportunities for them.

Providing a voice

We apply our knowledge and expertise within the VCS into sector led networks, and multi-agency partnerships in County Durham, the northeast and nationally. We achieve this, through effective leadership, and representing sector interests and the issues that affect communities in County Durham. Through championing the interests of our local VCS, we can influence and help shape public sector policy, and the design and commissioning of local services.



Supporting our communities:

- 871 VCS organisations received information, advice & guidance.
- 339 organisations and community groups participated in Share & Learn.
- 809 delegates participated in community development workshops.
- 68 community organisations were directly assisted through the Community Hubs Development Programme.
- 40 Cree organisations were assisted, supporting 330 Cree members.
- We successfully completed delivery of the VegCities campaign.
- The Community Food & Growing Network was relaunched as a bi-monthly online forum.



Supporting volunteering:

- Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA) quality mark awarded.
- 681 new volunteers helped with information, advice and guidance.
- 46 training sessions delivered, attracting 434 delegates from 149 organisations and groups.
- 71 organisations attended 2 or more training sessions.
- 239 active members of the Co. Durham Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum.
- 4 online Volunteer Co-ordinator Forum meetings were held with increased member participation.
- We sustained contact and support for spontaneous and emergency volunteering activity. and assisted Town & Parish Councils with support for Community Resilience Planning.



As the voice of the Voluntary & Community Sector, we:

- Assisted with development of a Connector commissioning mode.
- Built strong linkages with the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) through a Social Prescribing Link Workers Network.
- Represented the VCSE on the Regional Funders Network and in multi-sector Task Groups.
- Participated in the Funding & Volunteering Task Groups of the County Durham Together Partnership.
- Chaired the Better Together Network including two policy forums, and the Advice in County Durham Partnership. Contributed to the County Durham Partnership Board from a VCSE perspective.

Credits:

Front cover photographs (clockwise from top left): 1. Castleside CHDP Governance Training; 2. 2023 Volunteers Fair; 3. Community Growing at Blackhill & Consett Park; 4. Development Session at Gainford Village Hall; 5. Cotherstone Village Hall Kitemark Presentation; 6. Whorlton Village Hall; 7. DCA Staff preparing for a community development session. (Photos: Durham Community Action, except 3. which is courtesy of Martin Weston, Friends of Blackhill & Consett Park).

Rear cover photographs (clockwise from top left): 1. Are you capital funding ready seminar; 2. Durham University Volunteers Fair; 3. Gainford Village Hall development session; 4. DCA staff awayday at Lumley Castle; 5. 2023 Volunteers Fair; 6. Community Growing at DCA's offices; 7. Preparing for a DCA consultation event. (Photos: Durham Community Action).

Above photos: (Top) Lands Village Hall receiving National Lottery Communities Fund funding through the CHDP; (Middle) AYCC stand at County Durham Volunteer Fair; (Bottom) Delegates chatting at the Better Together Forum (All photos: Durham Community Action).

DCA 2023 Annual Review: written, edited, and designed by Russell Hayward. © Durham Community Action 2023.



A year of challenges

It was another busy and fulfilling year for Durham Community Action (DCA), as we managed our existing work and continued to develop our range of services. Once again, we focused our activities around our work with communities, our support for volunteering, and ensuring that the views and interests of the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) were heard and represented by local and national policymakers. In this review we outline our objectives and achievements during the year to 31 March 2023.

Despite the challenges posed by inflation and service demand pressures, the strong contribution made by the team at DCA, and by colleagues across the VCSE has never been more needed. We provide practical and emotional support, which helps to underpin community resilience, & enable community led action.

In response to this landscape, we collaborated with colleagues in the VCSE, and across the Public Sector, and kept in touch with organisations and groups that helped to sustain community support networks during and immediately after Covid-19. Building on lessons learned, 2022/23 was about supporting communities to reopen, rebuild and grasp new opportunities.

Colleagues in the VCSE are adapting service provision to meet community needs, whilst battling strained funding and rising delivery costs. Staff recruitment and retention remains a challenge, and capacity has been weakened by the effects of Covid-19, poor health outcomes, financial pressures, and the need to rebuild volunteering capacity. International factors including the conflict in Ukraine, its direct impact on energy prices, and the resultant cost of living crisis, have dealt a further body blow to an already fragile sector.

There are complex challenges for both the VCSE and our partners in the public sector with respect to equitable provision of public services, including health, social care, and education. These challenges include the impacts of poverty, poor and worsening mental health and the escalating rate of the cost of living. We are seeing increases in numbers using food and fuel banks, and new faces queuing for food and debt advice. These challenges are evident and visible, and there seems little prospect of any early improvement. The range and depth of challenges, in the wake of the pandemic and cost of living crisis, remains a concern.

During the year, we were awarded the Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation, a quality mark for organisations delivering volunteer centre functions. It provides assurance to volunteer centre stakeholders.



Kate Burrows
Executive Director

of the quality of our provision. Our success as one of the first organisations to be accredited is a testament to the commitment and dedication of our Team.

We have worked hard over many years to build the confidence and trust of our communities, navigating numerous challenges along the way. Earlier this year, we surveyed our stakeholders to better understand the effectiveness and value of our approach, to inform our future development by ensuring that activities are aligned with sector needs, and to reaffirm for our funders, the impact of infrastructure support & value to local organisations. We received 300+ responses from across the VCSE and the public sector to the independent survey, and were grateful to achieve an overall rating of 4.37 out of 5 (with 5 being very good, and 1 being very poor). Individual feedback was very positive, with praise for the expertise and knowledge of our staff, & our relational / collaborative approach. The survey recognised some challenges too, most notably ongoing funding, and staff / volunteer capacity.

Indeed funding remains an ongoing challenge right across the VCSE, and we are very fortunate and grateful to have the ongoing support of County Durham Community Foundation, Defra, Durham County Council, the Durham Police & Crime Commissioner's Office, North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, The National Lottery Communities Fund, and our other funders. On behalf of our Members, Staff and Trustees I would like to say a special thanks and appreciation to our funders for their continued support for DCA & the VCSE sector.

This is my first review since I took over the reins as DCA's Executive Director in September 2022. It has been a whirlwind few months, but hugely rewarding, and I am relishing the challenges ahead, supported by DCA's fantastic team of Staff and Trustees, who are without doubt DCA's most valuable asset. Very special thanks too to my predecessor, Jo Laverick, who is now enjoying some welcome free time, after 18 years of great service to DCA. With best wishes

Kate



In the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, our over-riding priority at DCA was to keep in close touch with volunteer led community groups, finding out about their particular needs, fears, and concerns, and providing them with practical information, advice, and guidance as they began to recover and rebuild.

Many individuals and organisations appreciated our continued focus on training and funding advice, much of it delivered online as we made good use of new technologies adopted at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. We supported the wider VCSE with information and good practice via our social media platforms, overhauled our website with improved navigation and a fresh new look, and developed our range of audio / video case studies and podcasts to help share knowledge.

Greater use of new technology also freed up staff time to provide bespoke support for groups through face-to-face meetings, as we made a tentative return to normality after the pandemic.

809 people participated in themed workshops during 2022/23, including Meet the Funder, Community Buildings, Themed Meetings & the Good Food Network. In total our staff were able to support 871 VCSE groups and organisations with information, advice, and guidance. We also continued to assist local groups planning for community-led housing initiatives.

Share and Learn

Managed by DCA, this is a face-to-face & online network for community organisations and groups. We provide a fully subscribed programme of events and training covering a range of topics. The network has 339 active members located throughout County Durham.



Delegates attending a DCA Share & Learn training session on Digital Inclusion (Photo: Durham Community Action).



Introduction to our Community Business & Raising Finance workshop delivered in conjunction with County Durham Community Foundation, Northstar. and the Plunkett Foundation, (Photo: Durham Community Action).

Refreshing DCA's website

DCA's website proved its worth during the Covid pandemic, helping to keep our communities fully informed. During 2022 we relaunched the website with a fresh new look, and easier navigation, whilst retaining continuity through the use of DCA's existing colours and overall brand design. Check it out at www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk.

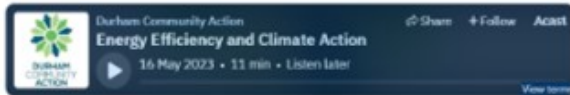
New technology also enabled us to add fresh interactive features including audio / video case studies, and podcasts, enabling us to share good practice through interviews with local community activists representing groups and organisations that have received advice and support from DCA. Topics covered include Community Growing, Crees, Energy Efficiency & Climate Action, Funding, Hallmark, Safeguarding, Social Prescribing, and Volunteering. Look out for links to a few of these in this review, or check them all out at:

www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk/case-studies
www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk/podcasts





DCA has been actively involved with climate change initiatives over the past year, with a community led & volunteer involving focus. We have been working with regional VCSE partners to support the Going Green Initiative that is managed by VONNE on behalf of the sector. Find out more, and hear how Nettlesworth Community Centre has benefited from a community building energy efficiency grant in our podcast:



Click on the icon above or visit our podcast page: <https://shows.acast.com/dca-podcasty/episodes/energy-efficiency-and-climate-action>

DCA is also a member of the County Durham Environment and Climate Change Partnership, chairing the Place, Health & Communities working group, and participating in the Climate Emergency Strategic Group. This allows us to represent the VCSE, in an important strand of policy development.



Whorlton Village Hall, one of 26 buildings to benefit from an Energy Efficiency grant (Photo: Durham Community Action).

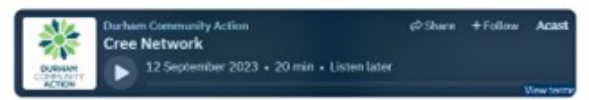
Community Building Energy Efficiency grant

Supported by Durham County Council, we have worked alongside the Business Energy Efficient Project (BEEP) and the Low Carbon Economy teams to support community buildings to reduce their carbon footprint and make their buildings more energy efficient. As a result, we were able to provide a small grant programme to support community buildings to invest in low carbon measures following an energy efficiency audit. Over the course of the year, DCA assisted 26 organisations with individual grants of up to £5000 for works including insulation, draughtproofing, renewable heating systems, energy efficient lighting, fitting heating controls, and water saving / heating gadgets. The grants helped to lever in an additional £55,000 of local funding for community centres.

The Cree Network

DCA has been supporting the Cree Network in County Durham for several years. Based on the Australian Men's Shed movement, the network has evolved and expanded to offer a safe, communal space for men, women and young people who may be experiencing poor mental health, or be at risk of social isolation, self-harm, or suicide.

There are now 40 Crees operating throughout Co. Durham. RT Projects in Gilesgate, Durham encourages users to develop their artistic skills, whilst also offering a warm and welcoming place for users to socialise and share their experiences, supported by caring staff, in a non-judgemental setting. Hear from Amanda Healy at Durham County Council, and learn about Leanne and Kay's experiences at RT Projects, & the Just for Women and Dene Valley Community Partnership Crees, by listening to our Cree Network podcast:



Click on the icon above or visit our podcast page: <https://shows.acast.com/dca-podcasty/episodes/cree-podcast>

We provided information and training, particularly promoting safeguarding and risk awareness for staff and volunteers in the sector. Partnering with ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), we also organised events to mark Village Halls Week in January 2023.



Gainford Village Hall committee members getting into the spirit of Village Halls Week (Photo: Paul Place, Gainford Village Hall).



The past year marked the final phase of the CHDP (Community Hubs Development Programme) funded by the National Lottery Communities Fund, which DCA has delivered since 2019. The programme has supported capacity building in community spaces, and was extended for 7 months from September 2022 with a refreshed focus around climate action issues.

The programme made significant progress, helping a cohort of 68 community organisations during the year. Organisational health checks were undertaken for a number of hubs, identifying issues that underpinned the hubs' support requests. Alongside in-depth governance support, Trustee recruitment, help with funding searches and legal structures, many hubs also had a clear focus on climate action.

Some hubs aimed to reduce their carbon footprint through improvements to the fabric of their building, whilst others had ambitious plans to modernise. We connected them to the Community Buildings Energy Efficiency programme, and provided help to develop their plans e.g., feasibility studies & funding searches.

Several organisations wanted to demonstrate the quality of the services offered and standards they aspired to when managing their hubs, by working towards quality marks e.g., Hallmark, Investing in the Environment, and Volunteering Kitemark.

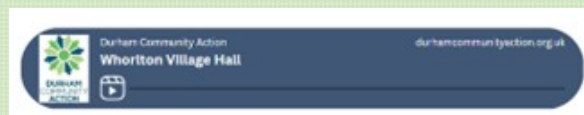
Some Hubs are now participating in the Community Spaces Partnership Project which commenced in April 2023. This is a collaboration between ACT (Action with Communities in Cumbria), Community Action Northumberland, DCA, and The National Lottery Community Fund.

Whorlton Village Community Association

has been registered as an unincorporated charity since 1991. It is based in the Village Hall, which is a former chapel dating from 1840. Since 2020, new committee members have been working hard to modernise and develop the potential of the hall.

The Committee approached DCA regarding Hallmark accreditation, as they wanted to future proof the organisation. Some older committee members felt that there was a limit to what they could do. The Hall had a few active volunteers who organised coffee mornings, but more were needed. Committee members also felt there was potential to attract more users if the condition of the hall could be improved. The windows, lighting, and poor insulation were particular concerns.

Involvement in the CHDP helped the Committee to look at their governance in more detail. DCA helped with Trustee & Volunteer recruitment, and training around Trustee roles and responsibilities. Following an organisational health check and a referral from DCA to the Energy Audit Team, the Association was then able to secure a £5,000 energy grant towards replacing windows, installing LED lighting & insulation. The Committee are now working towards the Hallmark 2 quality standard. Find out more by watching our video case study:



Click on the icon above or visit our YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXLCcKBLR4A>



With DCA's help, Whorlton Village Hall in Teesdale has been refurbished to a high standard, and features energy efficient LED lighting, insulation and replacement windows. The Hall is now well used with a diverse range of activities, including Coffee Mornings, Yoga, and evening jazz concerts (Photographs: Durham Community Action).



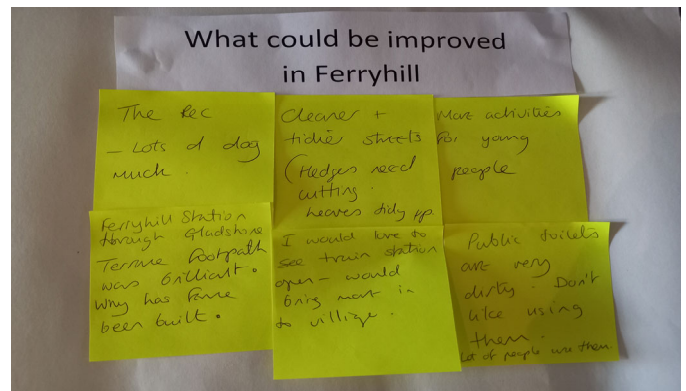
Ferryhill Community Plan

DCA has an effective track record of supporting community consultation and engagement, and in 2022 we were commissioned by Ferryhill Town Council to help them to develop a Community Plan. Ferryhill is 7 miles south of Durham City, and has a population of 11,000. The initial aim was to find out about local community services, however, inspired by the Santa Monica project in the USA, the project was broadened to take a wellbeing approach, by providing a baseline for improving policies, attracting and prioritising resources, and by catalysing local partnerships to strengthen the quality of life.

DCA supported the local steering group to develop an online survey that was widely circulated within the community, to local schools, via local businesses, and in the local press. Response rates to the survey were very encouraging and represented a fair and balanced cross-section of the community. Useful feedback was also gathered regarding key aspects of living in the town, and local service provision.



Ferryhill Community Plan community consultation event. (Photos: Durham Community Action).



Making a difference

Although the aftermath and ongoing recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic presented significant challenges, we can point to a number of positive outcomes from our work during the year:

- As a broker and information point for the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector, we were able to ensure the sector had rapid access to relevant, timely guidance and advice as they rebuilt after Covid restrictions. We supported and advised community services about how they could manage the issues and problems that emerged for volunteer led groups, such as sustaining their volunteer base, and dealing with fuel costs and increasing demands on services.
- Advice, guidance, and interventions helped to sustain community-based services delivered by volunteers, and community buildings managed by local people, helping them to establish, grow and develop the resources they need (staff, volunteers, and funding) to continue supporting their beneficiaries.
- Peer to peer networks for volunteer trustees were expanded and supported, ensuring greater shared learning, problem solving, and confidence building to plan and to sustain their offer.
- Knowledge, understanding and access to a changed funding climate were improved within the VCSE.
- Volunteers and front-line staff were able to work together across sectors, to develop good practice and to provide stronger support for their clients and user groups.
- Lessons learned and intelligence were shared and disseminated, ensuring a clear view of social infrastructure issues arising through cost-of-living pressures, and through longer term adjustments to different ways of working and the tools required e.g., digital services and reach for the most vulnerable and isolated people.

Supporting volunteering



Support for volunteering is one of the key pillars of our work. During the year we collaborated with volunteering organisations and individual volunteers, supporting health and wellbeing initiatives, providing advice and access to resources and training, and promoting local community action.

We worked with partners to co-ordinate support for organisations and their volunteers as they began to rebuild in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. We also supported the on-going development of a scheme for Employee Supported Volunteering (ESV).

Online training and support sessions on a range of subjects were further expanded and developed, helping to ensure that volunteer involving organisations had the resources and skills needed to support volunteers and their beneficiaries safely, and in full compliance with their legal obligations. Sessions covered included Volunteer Recruitment & Management, Volunteers and the Law, Safeguarding, Disclosure and Barring, and Cyber Security.

During the year, 46 training sessions attracted 434 delegates from 149 organisations and groups, with 71 organisations attending more than 1 training session.

We developed and sustained our online County Durham Volunteering Platform for recruiting volunteers and promoting opportunities. In addition, 681 people, all new to volunteering, were helped with advice, information, and guidance during the year, via the Centre for Volunteering,

Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA)

This is the quality mark for organisations delivering local Volunteer Centre functions. It assures people seeking volunteering opportunities, volunteer involving organisations, partners, commissioners, and funding organisations, that the holder provides a high quality and effective local service. Accreditation takes place through an application process, which includes a peer assessment, interviews with trustees, staff, volunteers, organisations using the service and other stakeholders. It is valid for three years, and covers good practice, strategic development of volunteering, brokerage, volunteering opportunities, and voice.

DCA was thrilled to be awarded the Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA) for County Durham by NAVCA following a rigorous assessment, one of the first three organisations to receive the award. DCA was awarded 'exceeds expectations' in four of the five assessment outcome areas detailed above, recognition of the quality of service provided.

Co. Durham Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum
DCA facilitates the forum which provides staff and volunteers with an opportunity to network with counterparts in other organisations who have similar responsibilities. Meetings include a mix of support, presentations and training on a range of topics, everything from volunteer policy and legislation, through to local training opportunities.

The forum had another productive year, with an active membership of 239 organisations that work with volunteers. 4 meetings were held during the year with increasing attendance and improved networking, as members looked to rebuild their volunteering capacity in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The January 2023 forum was themed around the national 'Vision for Volunteering' which recognises the changing nature of volunteering through different breakthrough moments, including Covid 19. The Vision tackles five key themes - awareness and appreciation of volunteering; power; equity and inclusion; collaboration; and experimentation; it explores how volunteering must adapt and evolve in each area. Find out more in our podcast:



Click on the icon above or visit our podcast page: <https://shows.acast.com/dca-podcasty/episodes/vision-for-volunteering>



A face-to face meeting of the County Durham Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum (Photo: Durham Community Action).



VOLUNTEER CENTRE
County Durham Volunteer Centre



Supporting volunteering

Building on our previous efforts during the pandemic, we sustained, developed, and evaluated the Volunteer Bank for Covid vaccinations and immunisations approach. We also developed closer relationships with Social Prescribing Link Workers and the Primary Care Networks (PCNs), so that they are better connected to the Volunteer Bank to inform longer term opportunities for development.

We informed and consulted with the VCSE Safeguarding Network and provided representation on both the Children and Adult Safeguarding Boards in County Durham. Network views are fed through to Safeguarding Board meetings and training events, helping to inform and shape resources.

Contact and support for spontaneous & emergency volunteering activity was sustained, and we assisted Town and Parish Councils to develop Community Resilience Planning. This support proved timely as communities began to rebuild in the aftermath of the succession of storms during Winter 2021/22.

Durham Area Youth Awards

As sponsors of the Young Volunteer Award, we were delighted to be invited to the Awards Evening to present our award to Aimee Adamson. The event showed appreciation for young people in County Durham, the impact they have on their communities and the great support work coming from youth organisations.



Aimee Adamson, Young Volunteer of the Year (centre) is pictured receiving her award from DCA's Hannah Foster (left) & Abby Thompson (right). Photo: Durham Area Youth.

The Volunteer Kitemark

The County Durham Volunteer Kitemark is awarded to organisations demonstrating a commitment to their volunteers, and dedicated to providing a high-quality volunteering experience for their service users & their volunteers. It is a free quality standard that is designed to recognise organisations for overcoming the barriers to volunteering. funders, stakeholders, volunteers, commissioners of services and other VCS organisations all recognise the kitemark which shows that volunteers can expect to receive a high-quality, positive volunteering experience. It can help volunteers make informed choices about which organisation(s) to apply to.

Training for new and renewing organisations is delivered online. 6 new organisations and 1 renewal were awarded the Kitemark during the year, with a significant number of other applications in progress.



Jim Welch, Chairman & Founder of Blind Life in Durham is pictured holding the Volunteer Kitemark certificate, accompanied by fellow committee members. (Photo: Durham Community Action).

Making a difference

The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to present significant challenges; however, we can point to a number of positive outcomes during the year:

- As a result of our work, volunteer involving organisations in County Durham are more effectively networking, sharing good practice, and offering mutual support for tackling and finding solutions to problems.
- There are improved pathways for volunteers to access opportunities, develop their experience, and make contributions that are both valued and add value to civil society.
- There is now a robust and efficient system of communication and collaboration between front line staff in the NHS and the VCSE sector with respect to recruitment, support, and placements for volunteers.
- Volunteer led groups and organisations have support and ready access to advice and help when they need it. They are better informed and have the resources on hand that help them to ensure that their volunteers are well trained and supported.



Food & Community Growing Network

DCA sits on the advisory group for Food Durham, and facilitates the Community Growing and Food Network, which brings together like-minded people and organisations with projects or interests related to growing and food. The network allows community groups & organisations to communicate and collaborate, sharing good practice & support.

Network sessions are usually held bi-monthly, either online or face-to-face. Each session provides an opportunity for members to meet with other community groups and organisations, discussing topics of interest, sharing experiences and updates, and showcasing the work of individual projects.

Growing groups are always seeking opportunities to recruit more volunteers, so members really appreciated the November 2022 session, with its focus on Volunteering. Bella Dreissen from Sustain, explained how to recruit volunteers to the Good to Grow network, which is getting people involved in their local community gardens. Meanwhile, Charlotte Linton, DCA's Volunteering Specialist demonstrated Co. Durham Volunteering platform (<https://www.countydurhamvolunteering.org.uk>), gave top tips on recruiting volunteers. Volunteers from the Teesdale Community Resources Hub, and the Friends of Consett & Blackhill Park community garden group also shared their own experiences.

Find out more about the Community Growing & Food Network by listening to our podcast:



Click on the icon above or visit our podcast page: <https://shows.acast.com/dca-podcast/episodes/community-growing-and-food-network>



Community Growing in action at Blackhill & Consett Park
(Photo: Martin Weston, Friends of Blackhill & Consett Park)



Top: County Durham Volunteer Fair, Market Place, Durham
Below: Durham University Volunteers Fair
(Photos: Durham Community Action)



Volunteering events

Events and activities form an important part of DCA's volunteering calendar. They supplement direct support via the Volunteer Centre, and DCA's online volunteering portal, and provide a great opportunity to promote the positive benefits of volunteering to a captive audience, whether it be shoppers taking time out to visit the annual Volunteers Fair in Durham Market Place, or students at Durham University and the various colleges across County Durham seeking opportunities to do something valuable, whilst also gaining worthwhile experience.

Employability events are proving increasingly popular too; these enable us to promote our services and offer support to volunteer organisations and client groups. During the year we attended numerous other activities to promote volunteering; examples include a 50+ event at Stanley Civic Hall, the Believe Housing employability event, Durham Youth Network, and Whitworth Park Academy Careers Fair.



A voice for the VCSE sector

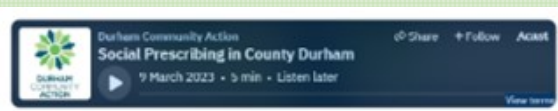
As an infrastructure service provider, we represent and champion the VCSE voice, through strategic multi sector partnerships, and reviews of partnership working across the sector. We also consult, survey, and analyse intelligence gathered from the VCSE sector, and disseminate it through partnerships.

During the year we worked with partners to ensure that a sustainable social & community infrastructure remains in place, and has access to the resources that are needed to help it thrive and rebuild.

Health and Wellbeing cross sector networking increased in complexity and importance, with key changes in primary care, access to mental health services and the firming up of the 'wiring' of the Integrated Care System (ICS). We focused on access to and building strong social prescribing linkages with the VCSE and changes in community based mental health support, and representation for the VCSE in strategic governance models for health management and commissioning.

Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLW)

SPLW's connect people to community-based support, including activities and services meeting practical, social, and emotional needs that affect health & wellbeing. This includes access to statutory services e.g., housing, financial and welfare advice. Find out more about SPLW's in our podcast:



Click on the icon above or visit our podcast page: <https://shows.acast.com/dca-podcasty/episodes/social-prescribing-in-county-durham>

We continued a shared approach to system and workforce development, ensuring that front line staff and volunteers have access to training and the tools needed to provide support e.g., access to referral pathways & link workers, funding for initiatives, and addressing the needs of people in crises triggered through health, financial or housing related issues.

We represented VCSE interests as a member of the County Durham Together Partnership, and as a member of the Board of the County Durham Partnership (CDP). This enabled us to collaborate with public sector colleagues to promote a joined-up policy for commissioning & funding, engaging with communities of interest in the development of new funding programmes, and influencing the provision of key services by engagement with Heads of Services.

Consultation and survey work with VCSE sector service providers enabled us to gather and share intelligence about needs, and issues arising from support work in the community. Important information and best practice were then disseminated through multi sector partnerships.

We ensured that the VCSE sector was engaged with co-production on responsive services to support mental health, access to advice providers and health care. Advice in County Durham and Better Together, as networks of countywide VCSE and specialist providers, were each mobilised to share insights and experiences, aiding the development and delivery of objectives arising from the Poverty Action Group.

Community Research Network

This is a way for communities to be actively and directly involved in setting research agendas, contributing experiences and collecting relevant information, influencing change in practice & policy.

We have partnered with colleagues at the Rural Design Centre to set up a Community Research Network (CRN) in County Durham. Communities living and working in Derwent Valley, Teesdale, and Weardale are suggesting what issues need to be investigated, and the CRN will then help them to collect and analyse data, produce information, and share the knowledge that is produced as a result.

Initial topics for investigation are the future of young people, health and wellbeing outcomes particularly related to post-Covid social recovery, and future-proofing services, systems & accessibility.

We have cross linked this work with the County Durham Partnership and academic colleagues, to ensure that it is aligned with the strategic goals of the County Durham Health & Wellbeing Board, County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy, and the strategic vision of County Durham Care Partnership and the regional Integrated Care Board.



Community Rural Network: Derwent Valley workshop in action (Photo: Durham Community Action).



Advice in County Durham (AiCD)

During the year, we chaired and supported Advice in County Durham (AiCD) multi-agency network, as the 'go to' practitioner network for all agencies to come together and join up services. Network members continued to provide advice & one to one casework support across County Durham. Internally, the ongoing development of a clearer governance framework and strategic work plan for AiCD supported the strength and impact of the partnership.



AiCD 10th Anniversary Forum
(Photo: Durham Community Action).

Making a difference

Although the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic presented significant challenges, there were a number of positive outcomes from our work during the year:

- Voluntary and community sector led partnerships are collaborating to shape community services. This will enable them to be responsive to the needs of communities that are struggling in the wake of the pandemic, and with the impacts emerging because of the economic downturn, particularly regarding mental health, food and fuel poverty and access to support and advice services. This in turn ensures that the voluntary sector is actively engaged and represented within key public sector led networks.
- Collaborative coalitions are working to influence the design and delivery of public service contracts.
- Front line VCS organisations are better informed and trained about the issues that affect them and the people they work with.
- Funding and investment into the VCSE sector are becoming more responsive, streamlined, and targeted, and more enabling in terms of sustaining a community infrastructure through the pandemic.
- The VCSE in County Durham has a strong representational base that is influencing the ways in which public services are shaped.

We once again chaired the Better Together Network, including two policy forums. We also contributed to the County Durham Partnership Board from a VCSE perspective. These roles have helped to inform strategic agendas for partnership working in County Durham, and for emerging new models of commissioning services.

Through County Durham Together, the Better Together Forum and AiCD Partnerships we continue to build collaborative responses to key themes facing our communities, including the cost-of-living crisis, opportunities for the delivery of the Household Support Fund, and supporting the Poverty & Health Alliance feasibility group.

Representing the sector on the Regional Funders Network, we helped to inform and shape funders approaches to supporting the sector through recovery from the shocks of Covid-19 and then Winter storms. Working with the County Durham Community Foundation, we also administered a micro grants scheme to support mutual aid groups with supplies, and a small grant scheme for community buildings.

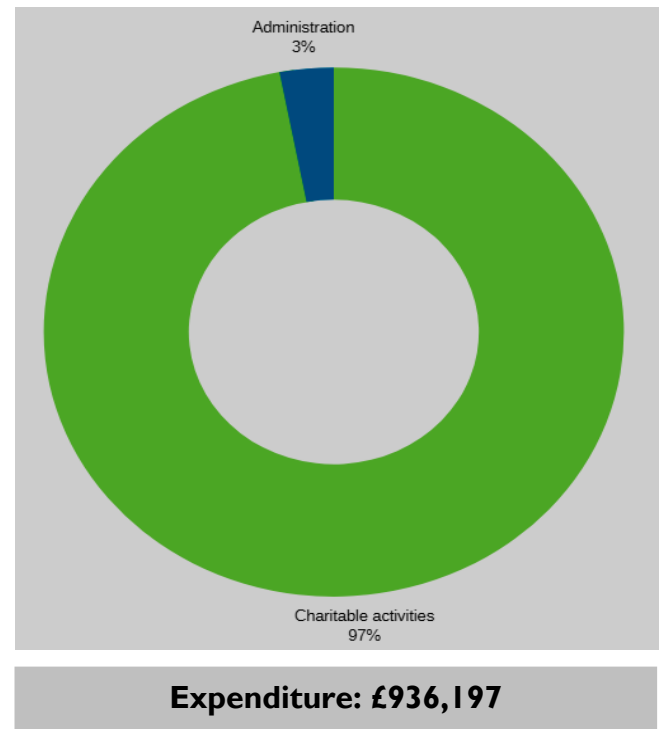
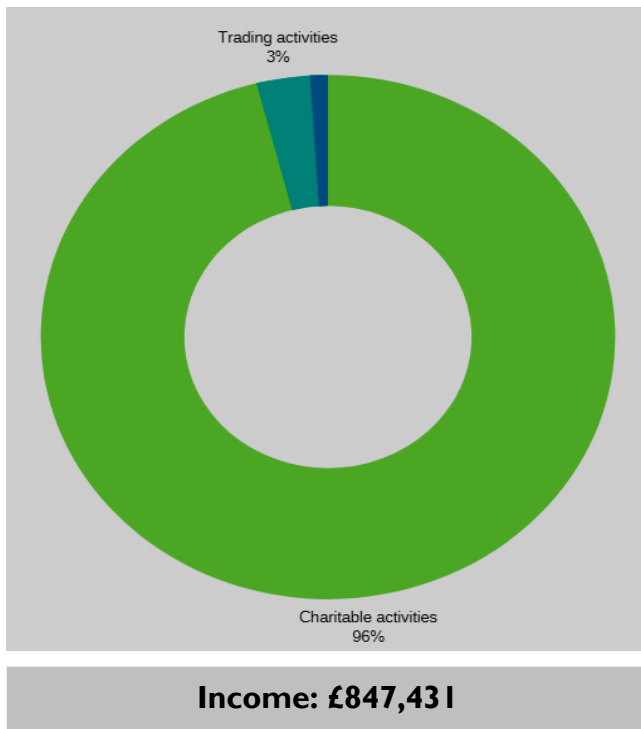
We continued with development of a Connector commissioning model, targeting funding into the VCSE sector more effectively, and consulting with

VCSE and commissioning colleagues through a Better Together Policy Forum. In addition, we represented VCSE interests in multi-sector Task Groups, tackling a range of topics including mental health, economic and community regeneration, funding and investment, and volunteering.

Collaborating with partners from the local authority and NHS / Public Health we co-ordinated communications, resources, and reach into communities, responding to local needs. We also co-ordinated and managed information exchanges for the VCSE and health & social care providers about good practice regarding social isolation, health, and wellbeing services, particularly in rural areas.



Our finances



The pie charts illustrate the income that we received during the 12 months ended 31 March 2023, and how it was invested into our work with communities. During the year, our income from core activities exceeded our expenditure, resulting in a surplus of £41,308 for the year. Meanwhile, we spent £130,074 more restricted project income, which was expected as we received a large inflow of restricted funding in 2021/22. Taken together the overall outcome was a deficit of £88,766 for the year. We generate investment from a variety of sources, including commissioning, consultancy, contracting, grant aid, and service level agreements. This ensures that all our activity takes place within our ethos of community development, and that it adds value to our other areas of work, including policy work and influencing.

Our funders

We gratefully acknowledge the support of all our funders, partners and customers including:

ACRE
Catalyst, Stockton-on-Tees
Cornforth Partnership
County Durham Community Foundation
County Durham Sport
DASH
Defra
Durham County Council
Durham Police & Crime Commissioner's Office
Ferryhill Town Council
Friends Together

Jubilee Fields Community Association
Livin
NAVCA
NHS North East & North Cumbria ICB
Spennymoor Youth & Community Centre
St Cuthberts Hospice
Teesdale Day Clubs
The National Lottery Community Fund
The Soil Association / Sustainable Food Places
Trimdon Village Hall

About us



Staff (serving in the year to 31/03/23)

Katie Baggott
Isla Ballard
Helen Brown
Kate Burrows
Fiona Christian
Tracy Emery
Hannah Foster
Susan Garrett
Tara Hallimond
Craig Hampton (from 06/06/22)
Lyndsey Hocking
Nicole Kirby (from 01/11/22)
Joanna Laverick (until 30/09/22)
Charlotte Linton
Allison Lishman
Abby Thompson
Susan Tron MBE

Trustees (for the year to 31/03/23)

Professor Sarah Banks
Mrs Linda Bird
Mrs Patricia Buckley-Atkins (Treasurer)
Mrs Jenny Flynn MBE (Vice-Chair)
Mrs Angela Hawkes
Mrs Elaine Kilgannon MBE
Mr Mike Litchfield
Professor Fred Robinson
Mr John Robinson
Mrs Clarice Smith
Mrs Jan Worters MBE (Chair)



DCA's Staff Team
enjoying a few
lighter moments!
(Photos: Durham
Community Action)

Find out more



www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk

www.countydurhamvolunteering.org.uk



<https://www.facebook.com/DurhamCommunityAction/>

<https://www.facebook.com/countydurhamvolunteercentre>



<https://twitter.com/DurhamComAction>

<https://twitter.com/durhamvolunteer?lang=en>

2023

ANNUAL REVIEW



**DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION**

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Crook
County Durham DL15 0BF

Charity number: 229119
Company number: 309329