

DURHAM COMMUNITY ACTION

Annual Review 2026

Our year at a glance



Supporting our communities:

- 969 organisations received information, advice and guidance
- 1175 people attended our Share & Learn Network events
- 633 people attended our community development workshops
- 235 groups enrolled in the Community Hubs Development Programme
- 13 groups assisted to obtain Community Spaces capital grants
- 23 Cree network members supported, hosting 39 separate Cree groups
- 18 groups assisted with bespoke consultancy support
- 71 trainees supported with bespoke training provision
- Defra Rural Housing Enabler programme for County Durham supported



Volunteering:

- 1029 new volunteers recruited through the online volunteering portal
- 26 volunteer promotion and recruitment events held
- 235 live volunteering opportunities advertised via the online portal
- 359 groups promoted volunteering opportunities via the online portal
- 603 active members of the Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum
- 4 Volunteer Co-ordinator Forum meetings held with 152 attendees
- 70 people and 15 firms at the Employee Supported Volunteering (ESV) event
- 167 members of the Community Growing & Food Network



Voice of the Voluntary & Community Sector:

- 70 members of the Social Prescribing Link Workers network supported
- Chaired the Advice in County Durham Partnership
- Chaired the Better Together Network of 61 VCSE organisations
- Delivered 2 Better Together policy conferences
- Provided VCSE input into the North East Combined Authority
- Arranged 24 small grants to groups to promote smoking cessation initiatives
- Hosted 2 Poverty Truth Commissions in County Durham
- Hosted the REACH initiative, examining ways to tackle health inequalities
- Hosted the Rural Durham Community Research Network

Durham Community Action:

- Awarded the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation by NAVCA
- Celebrated 90 years of supporting County Durham's communities
- Re-awarded the Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation by NAVCA
- Successfully achieved Investors in the Environment Silver Accreditation

Credits:
Front and rear cover photographs: Durham Community Action's 90th Anniversary celebration at Ushaw, November 2025.
This page: (Top) Green Arts group, part of the Cree Network; (Middle) Employer Supported Volunteering event; (Bottom) Rural Durham Community Research Network consultation event in Weardale.

All photographs within this Annual Review have been provided by Durham Community Action staff.
Durham Community Action 2026 Annual Review: text, design and layout by Russell Hayward. © Durham Community Action 2026.

A very special celebration

Welcome to Durham Community Action's Annual Review, reflecting on a busy and fulfilling year, and a special one too as we celebrated our 90th Anniversary. From humble beginnings in 1935, we have grown and developed to become an enthusiastic advocate and a trusted friend for the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector across County Durham and beyond.

We marked this occasion with a special event, and it was wonderful that so many friends and colleagues joined us to help celebrate this significant milestone. The event was a great opportunity to reflect on our work and impact over nine decades, and to hear from local groups about the differences that we have made to them, and to their communities.



More than 100 friends and colleagues joined us to celebrate DCA's 90th anniversary at Ushaw in November 2025

Find out more
Listen to our podcast celebrating 90 years of DCA's support for communities. Scan the QR code on your phone, or click here for details.

We work hard to ensure that voluntary & community organisations are recognised for the work that they undertake and their impact in communities, on people's health, their economic well-being, and their ability to enjoy their lives in their places.

With these objectives in mind, our activities were focused around Community Asset building, Volunteering Support, and ensuring the views and interests of the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) were heard and represented by policymakers. This review outlines our objectives and achievements during the year to 31 March 2026.

Colleagues across the VCSE face many demands in adapting service provision to meet community needs, secured amidst increasingly constrained funding and rising delivery costs. Staff recruitment and retention

Kate Burrows
Executive Director



present difficulties, even where funding and investment have been secured. In response to this landscape, we kept in touch with the organisations and groups that play a key role in sustaining community-led support activity, and maintained close collaborative work with VCSE and public sector colleagues.

Volunteer-led activity provides a safety net for those in need. During the year, we collaborated with colleagues in the VCSE, and in the public sector, to support communities with information, advice, and training, providing leadership and advocacy for volunteer led delivery, and amplifying the demonstrable contribution that the voluntary sector makes to our local economy.

As an infrastructure support provider, we play a key role in representing and championing the VCSE sector. Our efforts were recognised by NAVCA, the national body for local infrastructure organisations, when we were successfully assessed and awarded the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA), one of the first in the region to hold this prestigious accolade.

Once again, we were fortunate and grateful to have the support of Durham County Council, Defra, the National Lottery Community Fund, National Lottery Community Fund - Climate Action Fund, North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, the Office of the Durham Police & Crime Commissioner, Point North Community Foundation, and our other funders. On behalf of DCA, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to all our funders for their support.

Despite the ongoing challenges, we look to the future with confidence and enthusiasm, adapting, innovating, and responding to new and emerging needs, just as we have done for the past 90 years. I am hugely grateful for the support of our fantastic team of Staff and Trustees, and wish to say a special thank you to our Chair, Jan Worters, who is retiring from our Board of Trustees. Jan has been a tremendous advocate and champion for Durham Community Action and will be greatly missed; it is reassuring that she is leaving us in strong and capable hands as we move forward into the next phase of our development.

With best wishes *Kate*

Supporting our communities

Keeping in touch, understanding the needs and concerns of volunteer led community groups, and offering practical advice, guidance, information, news and updates provided a key focus for our work during the year. We supported the development and public access to community spaces and services, assisted Cree groups offering informal mental health support, and provided networking opportunities.

Individuals and organisations appreciated our continued focus on training, capacity building, and funding advice, with flexible delivery options both online and face to face, helping to meet the changing needs of our users. The VCSE also benefited from information and good practice shared via our social media platforms, podcasts, audio and video case studies, and 185+ targeted electronic newsletters; these covered a broad range of topics across the year, including our monthly 'Community News' which now reaches more than 3,600 subscribers.

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)
IAG remained an essential part of our offer, with 303 new general enquiries, and 969 individuals and organisations receiving assistance. Around half of the enquiries received related to governance and funding, however other issues often underpinned those initial enquiries, including cost of living pressures, developing project ideas, energy efficiency, managing staff & volunteers, setting up new community groups, strategic and operational planning, and trusteeship. Our Community Development Officers also provided bespoke support tailored to meet the needs of individual VCSE organisations. In demand topics included Charity Commission / Community Interest Company registration, strategy development sessions, and training on governance, finance, and volunteer management.



Isla Ballard, Community Hubs Development Lead outlining DCA's support for communities at the Durham Employment Connections Event

Community Hubs Development Programme
Through the Community Hubs Development Programme, we focused on supporting community organisations to adopt energy efficiency measures for community buildings. The programme has generated several initiatives supported by a range of funding partners. We also adopted ideas for use within Durham Community Action (DCA), which was recognised in our own successful assessment for Investors in the Environment silver accreditation, having progressed from previous bronze status.



A few of our team members celebrating DCA's successful Investors in the Environment Silver Accreditation

Community Spaces Partnership (CSP)
Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, and delivered with our counterparts in Cumbria and Northumberland, this initiative supported 83 community hubs during the year, with one-to-one support around governance, legal issues (especially leases) and quality standards. In total, 13 community hubs were able to secure grant funding to make energy efficiency improvements to their buildings, or overcome barriers to development with the help of specialist technical and legal support.

Find out more
During Village Halls Week we focused on connecting communities to health & wellbeing. Find out more from our podcast. Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here.

Supporting our communities

Climate Action in Rural North East (CAIRN)
CAIRN aims to reduce energy costs and combat climate change. The project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund – Climate Action Fund, and delivered in partnership with Community Action Northumberland, NICRE (National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise), and the Rural Design Centre, is helping rural communities across Durham and Northumberland to take control of energy usage and create a greener future. The project delivered a range of innovative activities tailored to the needs of isolated rural areas, including carbon assessments, community energy projects, free household energy advice covering renewable options, installation of solar photovoltaic batteries on community buildings, and training and skills development. We also worked with Chilton Scout group to co-design a programme of activity engaging local young people in community energy issues.

Home Energy Audits
As part of the CAIRN project, we are providing free, independent and impartial energy advice to households across County Durham, with a particular focus on supporting rural and off-gas communities. Our qualified energy advisors are able to use a thermal imaging camera to identify where energy is being lost, and can explain simple changes that will improve comfort, reduce energy use, and save money. We provide free energy-saving measures, such as lightbulbs, radiator foil, and draught excluders, and advice and support around carbon monoxide safety, providing free detectors where appropriate. We can also explain energy bills and tariffs, and signpost to possible grant funding.



DCA's CAIRN delivery team (pictured left to right): Georgia Donohue, Isla Ballard, Craig Hampton & Tracy Emery

Electric Vehicles in Teesdale Partnering with the Rural Design Centre (RDC) and with additional funding through the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub, we were able to explore opportunities for rural, social tariff community electric vehicle charging points in 5 areas within Teesdale. We engaged with 141 community members across the area. Charge My Street and Cybermoor have been working at each site to clarify the most appropriate charging model and payment structure. The scheme is being rolled out and promoted during 2026.



Lindsay Henderson (front left) and Craig Hampton (second from right) working with partners to develop the electric vehicle initiative in Teesdale

Community Buildings Energy Efficiency Grant
This grant initiative, supported by Durham County Council's Low Carbon Economy Team reached its conclusion during the year. The grant scheme, and associated energy audits enabled 62 community buildings to make significant changes to their buildings with the aim of lowering energy bills and reducing their carbon footprint. The availability of other local funding streams has led to more opportunities to develop net zero projects, and we have continued to add value by supporting some projects through the Climate Action in Rural North East (CAIRN) initiative.

Find out more
Visit our website for more information about the CAIRN project. Scan the QR code on your phone, or click here for details.

Supporting our communities



'Boost Your Income Through Trading' workshop at Wheatley Hill Community Centre

Training

Our free training, delivered online and in person, was well received with positive feedback. The initiative is helping to build capacity in volunteer led community organisations. 51 courses & workshops were delivered to 633 individuals; topics included GDPR, understanding Trustee responsibilities, and community engagement. Bespoke training was offered to meet specific organisational needs. We also offered funding information and support, and hosted 16 Meet the Funder events reaching 209 representatives from 130 organisations. During Adult Safeguarding Awareness Week, we worked with sector partners to promote safeguarding & risk awareness, information and training, and contributed to on-line activities and events.

Share and Learn Network

Membership of the network increased to 831 organisations and groups during the year, reflecting the value that members place on the support provided. We offered a fully subscribed programme of networking and training, including 6 events through the Community Buildings Network that brought together 119 VCSE colleagues to network and share best practice.



Members of the Management Committee at Winston Village Hall receiving their Hallmark Quality Accreditation

Enterprise Durham Partnership

During the year, we engaged with the 'Enterprising Durham Framework' supporting start-ups in County Durham, which has been shaped to include charitable and social enterprises within its support framework. Our aim was to maximise appropriate support and funding packages to rural social enterprises.

Working in partnership with the North East Business and Innovation Centre (NEBIC) and Create North we delivered 'Third Sector Animation', offering tailored support on suitable legal structures to 20 organisations, and 'Boost Your Income' workshop sessions which attracted 13 attendees.



(Above) Ladies Together crafting group making teddy bears, and (right) Screen Printing Group, just two of many activities organised within the County Durham Cree Network

The Cree Network

We continued to support the Cree Network of community groups that provide informal mental health support. 23 organisations hosting 39 groups in the network participated in a range of developmental workshops, and received help to access grant aid. This support has enabled them to offer a safe, communal space providing activities and training opportunities to over 600 women, men and young people who may experience poor mental health, and be at risk of social isolation, self-harm, or suicide.

Supporting our communities

Rural Housing Enabling programme
We are part of the national Defra funded Rural Housing Enabling (RHE) programme managed by ACRE, which aims to boost the supply of new rural affordable housing. The programme is supporting landowners and communities to identify sites and housing needs, whilst working with parish councils, housing associations, and local authorities to bring forward high-quality homes that meet local needs.

The RHE programme is building support, encouraging community engagement, and advising and steering communities through the many stages in the process, from initial interest to final completion. Our Rural Housing Enabler is able to act as an honest broker between the different parties, providing informed and impartial advice, and assisting communities and landowners to identify sites for affordable housing developments. We also lead a Rural Housing Advisory Group which supports the programme by developing connections and building local and regional influence.

Stanhope Housing Needs Survey
A full housing needs survey was undertaken on behalf of the Parish Council during the year. The survey identified a significant number of people who identified themselves in housing need, the majority of whom wished to remain within the Parish. Respondents expressed clear support for a development of new affordable homes, with the survey highlighting a number of existing dwellings where two families were present due to the lack of accommodation for independent living. A number of respondents also knew someone that had left the area due to a lack of suitable affordable housing provision.



Susan Tron, DCA's Rural Housing Enabler joining local residents residents at Cowshill & Lanehead Coffee Morning in Weardale to discuss rural housing

How we made a difference

- As a broker and information point for the VCSE, we were able to ensure the sector had rapid access to relevant, timely guidance and advice. We supported and advised community services about how they could manage the issues and problems faced by 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 Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector.
- Volunteers and front-line staff were able to work together across sectors, to develop good practice and help them 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.

Find out more
Visit our website for more details about Rural Housing Enabling in Co. Durham. Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here for details.

Supporting volunteering

Volunteering is a key part of our work, and we are proud to manage both the County Durham Volunteer Centre, and the online County Durham Volunteering platform for recruiting volunteers and promoting opportunities. During the year we were successfully reassessed by NAVCA, and awarded Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA) for a further 3 years, providing national recognition of the quality, consistency and impact of our volunteering service.

VOLUNTEER CENTRE
County Durham Volunteer Centre

New and existing volunteers were assisted with advice, information, and guidance via the Centre for Volunteering, and 26 volunteering promotion, recruitment and networking events were supported, including Volunteer Fairs, and two Durham Pound events.

We provided support and training for volunteers, and for volunteer led groups, advice, funding, and access to resources, and helped to ensure that volunteer involving organisations have the skills they need to support volunteers and their beneficiaries safely, and in full compliance with their legal obligations.

Working with partners, we co-ordinated support for organisations and their volunteers with advice and training, particularly regarding safeguarding. In addition, we invested significant time into developing the Employee Supported Volunteering Network (ESV) with encouraging results.

County Durham Volunteering Platform
Described as the 'home of volunteering' in County Durham, this is a dedicated web-based portal which allows users to browse opportunities and organisations, learn more about volunteering, and find out about events and meetings in County Durham for volunteers. The platform continued to be well used, with 235 live volunteering opportunities advertised at the year end, and 359 organisations actively using the site for volunteer recruitment; including 45 who were new to the site. In total, 1029 new volunteers were recruited during the year through the portal, and via other means of contact, and 155 new volunteering opportunities were advertised.

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV)
This provides a means by which companies can encourage or enable their employees to volunteer their time and skills to benefit the community. This may include organising team volunteer events, skill matching employees to meet the needs of community organisations, or providing time away from work for volunteering. ESV fosters a culture of social responsibility within companies, and provides valuable help to VCSE organisations.

The network developed significantly during the year, moving from initial engagement and promotion towards more structured and responsive brokerage. Key themes included improving the design and communication of volunteering opportunities for employers, increasing the focus on skills-based and project-based roles, and strengthening collaboration between employers and VCSE organisations.

We have established a robust ESV network which includes several large organisations that operate ESV programmes. Regular meetings provide an opportunity to discuss challenges, and share best practice, whilst an annual event showcases the offers available, and explains how the VCSE sector can access and utilise the skills and time of ESV scheme volunteers.



Employers and volunteers discussing opportunities at the Employer Supported Volunteering Network Event

Find out more
Visit our website for more details about Employer Supported Volunteering. Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here for details.

Supporting volunteering

Durham Together

We are a partner in the 'Durham Together' initiative, a Lottery funded employability project that is being jointly delivered with Cornforth Partnership, Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT), Wheels 2 Work County Durham, and WEA North East and Cumbria.

The project offers community-based support services, community learning, and bespoke training, to help individuals increase their confidence, improve their health and wellbeing and progress into further learning or sustainable employment.

Across the year, we delivered the Volunteer Passport to 32 volunteers in Willington, and Horden Hub House, with 9 learners completing their accredited learning during the period, and 4 more due to complete after the year end.

County Durham Volunteer Kitemark

The Kitemark is a free quality standard awarded to organisations that demonstrate a commitment to their volunteers, and a dedication to providing a high-quality volunteering experience for their volunteers and service users. Organisations that can show how their volunteering programmes overcome barriers to volunteering, and recognise the value of recruiting and retaining volunteers receive a certificate. Silvertalk and Wear Rivers Trust were amongst the organisations to be successfully assessed. During the year we made further improvements, including accreditation, and the development of a new digital platform to improve accessibility and streamline processes. This reflects our ongoing commitment to embedding good practice, inclusion and continuous improvement across the sector.



Volunteers from Silvertalk celebrating their Volunteer Kitemark success

County Durham Volunteer Passport

The County Durham Volunteer Passport aims to create a network of flexible volunteers who are fully recruited, consistently trained and supported, and ready to respond quickly and appropriately to the needs of the local community.

For volunteers, it offers the flexibility to switch between organisations and experience different volunteer roles, without repeatedly having to go through the full recruitment and training process. Meanwhile, organisations benefit from a single recruitment and training route that saves time and resources, and provides access to a wider and more diverse pool of volunteers. It also helps to build capacity in smaller organisations.



A face to face meeting of the County Durham Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum

Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum

The Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum supports a membership of 603 organisations that work with volunteers. We organised and hosted 4 sessions of the Forum, alternating meetings in person and on-line, which helped to attract increased participation from the membership. 152 volunteer co-ordinators attended meetings, supported by several guest speakers. Topics discussed included addressing barriers to volunteering, the role of AI in volunteer management, supporting neurodiverse volunteers and volunteer wellbeing and support. Participants also engaged in networking activities, providing a good opportunity to exchange best practice and discuss any emerging challenges.

Find out more

During Volunteers' Week, we spoke to local organisations about their volunteering experience. Listen to our podcast. Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here.

Supporting volunteering

Office of Durham Police and Crime Commissioner – Volunteer Framework (PCC)
Working with volunteers from the PCC we helped to gather insight into volunteer experience, including recognition and appreciation, the extent to which volunteers are aware of other roles across the PCC, and how effectively volunteers feel communicated with. This highlighted some key themes that have been used to develop a volunteer framework for the PCC, including policies, guidance and practical tools covering inclusive communication, impact measurement, recruitment, induction, supervision, and recognition. The work provides a strong foundation for improving volunteer experience, better retention & ensuring the value of volunteering is demonstrated across the PCC.

Training and support
This continued to be important part of our offer. 57 training sessions were delivered attracting 633 delegates from 308 organisations and groups, with 81 organisations attending more than one training session. Topics included Community Engagement, Disclosure & Barring, Health and Safety for Trustees, Scam Smart, and Volunteer Management. Bespoke sessions were tailored to meet the specific needs of individual organisations, attracting 39 participants. Feedback indicated that courses were delivered at the right pace, easy to understand, well organised, and met objectives.

How we made a difference

- As a result of our work, volunteer involving organisations are more effectively networking, sharing good practice, and offering mutual support for tackling and finding solutions to problems.
- Improved pathways for volunteers to access opportunities, develop their experience, and make contributions that are both valued & 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.

Community Growing and Food Network
This network brings together like-minded organisations and volunteers with projects, or an interest related to growing and food. We hosted several meetings, attracting 37 participants from 25 organisations across County Durham. Face to face sessions are supported by a Facebook group with membership increasing to 167 during the year. Information is shared within the group about upcoming events, funding opportunities, campaigns and news stories. Consultation is carried out to capture member views and explore future network activity, with the first meeting of 2026 held at Ushaw Moor Community Garden, and shaped in response to members views.



Spennymoor and Tudhoe Community Garden Is part of the Community Growing and Food Network

Events and activities
These form an important part our volunteering calendar, and provide an opportunity to promote the positive benefits of volunteering to a captive audience. We attended 26 volunteering promotion and recruitment events tailoring our key messages to the audience e.g. volunteering as an opportunity for a career change, and the benefits that volunteering can have on mental health and reducing loneliness. We attended events countywide, including the Advice in County Durham Roadshow at Stanley, Durham Pound Seminar, Durham University, Livin Jobs Fair, New College, and Spennymoor Pride in Place. We also sustained contact and support for spontaneous and emergency volunteering activity, and continued to inform and consult with the VCSE Safeguarding Network, providing representation on the Children and Adult Safeguarding Partnerships in County Durham. Contributions from the network feed into Safeguarding Partnership meetings and training, informing and shaping resources.

A voice for the VCSE sector

We play a role in representing and championing the VCSE Sector voice, through reviews of partnership working across the sector and strategic multi sector partnerships. We also consult, survey, analyse, and disseminate intelligence gathered from the VCSE.

Working with partners we ensured a sustainable social and community infrastructure remained in place, with access to the resources needed to help it thrive. By engaging with regional grant funding Foundations & Trusts, we were also able to inform and shape funders approaches. This included implementing a connector model, to more effectively support targeted funding into the VCSE sector, and consulting with VCSE and commissioning colleagues through Better Together Forum meetings.

Health and Wellbeing cross sector networking is increasing in complexity and importance, with key changes in primary care, access to mental health services and further changes within the Integrated Care Systems (ICS). Our focus has been on evolving changes in community based mental health support, access to and building strong social prescribing linkages with the VCSE (through delivery of a Social Prescribing Link Workers Network), and providing representation for the VCSE into the Integrated Care Board (ICB) strategic governance models.

We continued development of a shared approach to system and workforce development. This ensures that front line staff and volunteers have access to the training they need, and the tools to provide support e.g., access to referral pathways and link workers, funding for initiatives to address needs highlighted by people in crises that are triggered through health, financial or housing related issues. We also consulted with VCSE service providers and organisations to build stronger local connections with Primary Care Networks to support Social Prescribing models and new systems for access to health care.

Better Together Network
The network brings together senior representatives of 61 VCSE organisations, many with a countywide remit, to share best practice and opportunities to collaborate. During the year, we delivered Better Together policy conferences entitled 'Valuing and supporting a thriving VCSE: What does good grant making look like', and 'Celebrating a Thriving Voluntary and Community Sector: Showcase event'. We also chaired Better Together Forum Roundtable sessions on AI, Neighbourhood Health, and with the Independent Scrutineer of the County Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Rural Durham Community Research Network
With funding from UK Research and Innovation in partnership with The Young Foundation, we have. partnered with Durham County Council, Durham University, Insights North East, Newcastle University, Point North, and the Rural Design Centre to support the Rural Durham Community Research Network (CRN), enabling communities to share knowledge, & address local needs through evidence being heard, recognised, and valued. It is building capacity and capability in rural communities to lead their own research, share their findings, and influence policy and practice for rural places. The CRN is also exploring barriers to accessing health and social care, a lack of opportunities for young people, and access to critical public services.

In addition to community-led research sessions, the project has funded local research projects, examining the local impact of heritage and the arts; transport barriers to education, work, and community life; volunteer companionship on reducing isolation; and shared community spaces in supporting resilience, creativity, and social life.

The project has involved 215 individuals, 22 policy, public & academia representatives, decision makers, and interest from policymakers. 92 individuals attended workshops sessions, & 15 local individuals have been trained in community research.



Participants sharing ideas at an RDCRN Knowledge for Change workshop in Teesdale

Find out more
Listen to our podcast about Community Research Projects in County Durham Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here to download the Podcast.

Poverty Truth Commission (PTC)
The PTC in County Durham is funded by Durham County Council's Public Health team, and Point North Community Foundation. Hosted by DCA, Co. Durham is the only area within the national network to concurrently host 2 PTC's, covering Shildon & south Durham, and Stanley / Consett. The project amplifies the voices of local people experiencing poverty, creating direct connections with decision makers in positions of power, and hopefully leading to solutions to some of those challenges.

Both PTC's are now operational. 85 people attended the Stanley / Consett launch in March 2026. The event provided an opportunity for local people to share stories of their personal struggles with a wider audience, and included 2 young people who shared their own experiences of poverty.

Both PTC's meet regularly, and are making good progress. Working groups are considering access to healthcare services, disability, benefits, and domestic abuse, and relationships have been established with partnerships such as Advice in County Durham to embed lived experience into activity and decision making. The appointment of Civic Commissioners with local authority, health, police and business backgrounds is building and strengthening relationships with decision makers.



Community Commissioners sharing their first-hand experiences of poverty at the Stanley / Consett Poverty Truth Commission launch in March 2026

Find out more
Visit our website for more details about the Poverty Truth Commission. Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here for more details.

Partnerships
As a member of both the County Durham Together Partnership, and the Board of the County Durham Partnership (CDP), we were well-placed to represent VCSE interests. Our involvement enables us to collaborate with public sector colleagues promoting a joined-up policy for commissioning and funding, engaging with communities of interest in the development of new funding programmes, and influencing key service provision by engagement with Heads of Services.

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

Chairing and supporting County Durham Together, the Better Together Forum and Advice in County Durham Partnerships, we continue to build collaborative responses to key themes facing our communities, including opportunities for delivering welfare support, the cost-of-living crisis, and supporting the Poverty Truth Commission.

We represented VCSE interests in multi-sector Task Groups tackling mental health, economic and community regeneration, funding and investment, and volunteering. By collaborating with partners from the local authority and NHS / Public Health we co-ordinated communications, resources and reach into communities and responded to local needs. We also supported good practice information exchanges for VCSE and health and social care providers regarding social isolation, and health and wellbeing services, particularly in rural areas.

We were represented on and supported a range of networks and partnerships including County Durham Partnership Board, County Durham Economic Partnership, the Environment & Climate Change Partnership, Health & Wellbeing Board, North East Combined Authority, and Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adults Partnerships,

Through County Durham Together, the Better Together Forum and Advice in County Durham Partnerships, we continue to build collaborative responses to key themes facing our communities, including opportunities for delivering welfare support, the cost-of-living crisis, and supporting the Poverty Truth Commission.

A voice for the VCSE sector

REACH County Durham
This is a partnership project between DCA, Durham County Council and Durham University. The initiative is examining ways to tackle the unfair and avoidable differences in health experienced by communities across County Durham, which play a crucial role in shaping health outcomes.

Income, education, housing, employment, and social support networks contribute to a person's ability to maintain good health, however inequalities in these areas can lead to disparities in health, which is why addressing them is so important to public health, research, community interventions and policy efforts. REACH County Durham aims to mitigate these challenges and improve health for all, by helping to develop policies that promote equal opportunities, fair wages, and social inclusion.



REACH County Durham launch event, June 2025



Social Prescribing Link Workers meeting at Tudhoe Community Centre, August 2025

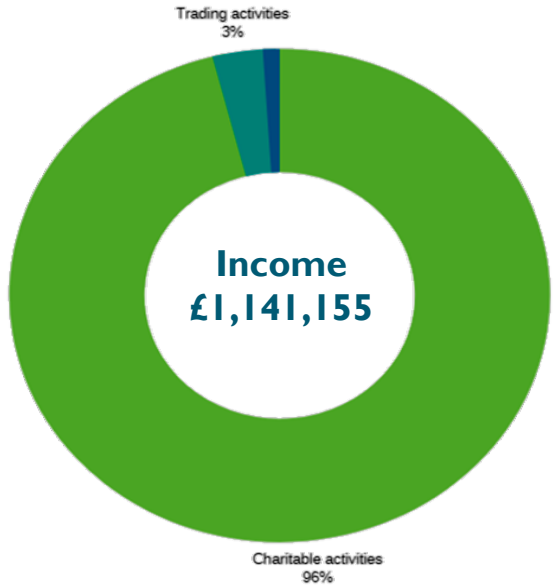
Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLW)
SPLWs connect people to community-based support, including activities and services meeting practical, social, and emotional needs that affect health & wellbeing e.g., housing, finance and welfare advice. We have developed close relationships with 70 SPLWs, providing them with information, networking, and professional training opportunities through a series of bi-monthly events. We also liaised with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to ensure better connections to volunteer led social infrastructure, informing longer term development opportunities.

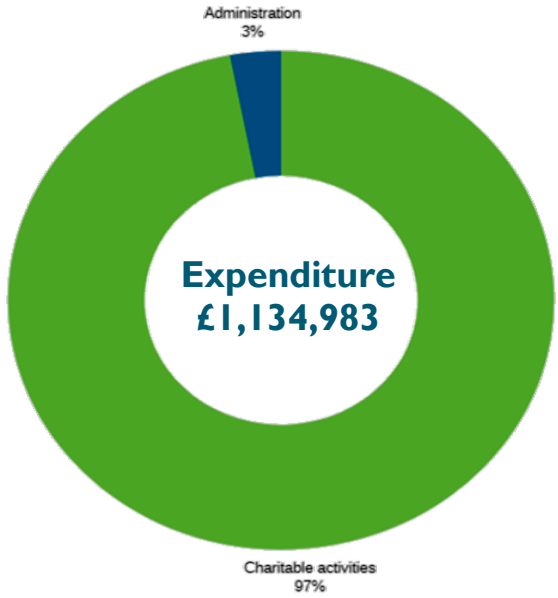
Find out more
Listen to our podcast about REACH County Durham. Scan this QR code on your phone, or click here to download the podcast.

How we made a difference

- 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 with significant inflationary pressures within the context of a cost-of-living crisis, particularly regarding mental health, food and fuel poverty and access to wellbeing support and advice services. This ensures that the voluntary sector is actively engaged and represented within key public sector led networks as they address issues of loneliness and isolation within our communities.
- 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 has a strong representational base that is influencing the ways that public services are shaped.

Our finances and funding





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

ACRE
Age UK County Durham
CBS Theatre Group
Communities CAN (NE)
Community Action Northumberland
Cornforth Partnership
Darlington Dolphins Table Tennis Club
Defra
Durham County Council
Durham Police & Crime Commissioner's Office
Durham University
East Durham Theatre Group
Newcastle University
NHS North East & North Cumbria ICB
North East Business and Innovation Centre
Northern Gas Networks
Pioneering Care Partnership
Point North Community Foundation
Rural Design Centre
Tees, Esk & Wear Valley Foundation Trust
Teesdale Day Clubs
The National Lottery Community Fund
The National Lottery Community Fund – Climate Action Fund
University College, London
Voluntary Action Leeds
VONNE
Wheels2Work County Durham

Income & Expenditure has been extracted from our financial statements for 2025/2026 and does not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of our Financial Affairs. Copies of our full audited accounts may be viewed on the Companies House website.

Our Social Media links

www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk
www.countydurhamvolunteering.org.uk

https://www.facebook.com/DurhamCommunityAction/
https://www.facebook.com/countydurhamvolunteercentre

https://www.linkedin.com/company/durham-community-action-limited/?originalSubdomain=uk

About DCA

Staff (year to 31/03/26)
Jemma Austin
Katie Baggott
Isla Ballard
Helen Brown
Kate Burrows
Fiona Christian (until 06/06/25)
Georgia Donohue (from 28/07/25)
Tracy Emery
Susan Fern
Rio Floreza
Susan Garrett
Cathryn Gathercole
Julie Gourley
Tara Hallimond
Craig Hampton
Lindsay Henderson (from 23/06/25)
Lyndsey Hocking (until 26/05/25)
Nicole Kirby
Charlotte Linton
Allison Lishman
Susan Tron MBE
Abby Weatherill

Trustees (year to 31/03/26)
Professor Sarah Banks
Mr Steve Bhowmick (from 20/11/25)
Mrs Linda Bird (Vice-Chair)
Mrs Patricia Buckley-Atkins
Mrs Karen Davison
Mrs Angela Hawkes
Mr Ian Hunter Smart
Mrs Elaine Kilgannon MBE
Mr Mike Litchfield (Treasurer)
Professor Fred Robinson (until 20/11/25)
Mr John Robinson
Mrs Clarice Smith
Mrs Jan Worters MBE



Our Staff Development Day at Lanchester Community Centre

Our values

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 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, and representing and providing a voice for the VCSE sector 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 VCSE 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 VCSE, we can influence and help shape public sector policy, and the design and commissioning of local services.

DURHAM COMMUNITY ACTION

Annual Review 2026



8 St Stephen's Court
Low Willington
Crook
County Durham DL15 0BF

Charity number: 229119
Company number: 309329