



Your Local Charity Improving Lives

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Our Support for Carers service helps people who care for adults across Leicestershire



Our Car scheme provides transport for elderly, disabled or rurally isolated people who can't use, or have no access to, public transport.



Tackling Loneliness and empowering older people to re-connect with their communities



Young Carers project offers carers aged 11 to 18 years old regular respite from their caring responsibilities



My Mind Matters is a Harborough based service which supports people who are concerned about their own or loved one's mental health

SUMMER REVIEW 2020

A Message from Maureen

Well I didn't expect this! What a year so far for VASL and the whole world. Back in January when we returned to work after the Christmas Break, we were looking forward to another full-on year, supporting our community and Improving lives across Harborough District and wider Leicestershire. I am pleased to say we are still very much supporting people, but we never expected our focus to be keeping everyone safe during a Pandemic.

VASL has risen to a challenge and for the past four months all our staff have been working from home, ensuring our services and projects are still running efficiently. We were very fortunate to have only last year, upgraded all our IT and Telephony systems, so it was just a case of moving PC's, plugging them in at home and by the miracle of technology 'ta da' we were all up and running.

I am so proud of each and everyone of VASL staff in how they have adapted. VASL Volunteers must also be congratulated for how quickly they adapted their volunteering where possible, to support our projects and clients. VASL is now moving forward with this new norm and planning what the next few months and potentially next year or so will look like for us. One thing is for certain, VASL will still be here thriving and providing much needed support in our community.

Very Best Wishes

Maureen

Charity Manager



SUPPORT FOR CARERS LEICESTERSHIRE

The number of unpaid carers in the UK has gone up by almost 50% during the pandemic.
- Carers UK research

2020 started well for the SFC Team. The new contract with LCC involved new challenges such as evening groups, and these were all put in place. VASL worked for a second time with De Montfort University and their graduate scheme and they welcomed Sarah Underhill into the team, having completed her internship, we were delighted to offer Sarah a permanent role and the team is now fully staffed. Kerry Turnbull continued to work with many local charities and authorities and the SFC were fully on track with the new 3 year contract to support Carers across Leicestershire

Reacting to the Covid-19 Pandemic

All the Support for Carers team have been working from home, when all groups stopped they had to come up with new ways to support their clients. All Clients were called regularly and there was an immediate rise in carers getting in touch. The team quickly reacted, and started supporting Carers through online Zoom groups which are proving very popular. A quiz was hosted online to those carers who had previously enjoyed the carers café in association with the Local Waitrose, and volunteers have been helping to ensure carers are getting all the support they need.

There has been a huge pressure on carers, during lockdown there was no physical contact with other carers, no time to themselves and many spoke about their exhaustion, along with the worry of protecting vulnerable loved ones who needed to be shielded. VASL helped them get support that was on offer and regularly kept in contact. There was sadly also a rise of carers facing palliative care as many cancer treatments were stopped, again the SFC researched and were able to help those with support.

SFC quickly realised the need for Carers to have ID cards to ensure they could make use of vulnerable time slots for shopping which were an enormous help. These were also shared with Age UK Leicestershire who were able to pass onto residents who had further lockdown restrictions.

SFC are currently supporting 3337 carers. They have seen a huge rise in referrals, with 276 (and growing) since March 23rd 2020.

In response to problems carers have had during the pandemic, they are now working to produce and supply Carer's Passports which will be a huge help to Clients.

SFC were also aware of a lack of referrals for Young Adult Carers so are working to increase activity on Social Media Platforms such as Instagram to help raise awareness of the help which is available.



In early 2020 the Car Scheme was continuing to take on new volunteers to meet growing demand, and then in early March recruited Liz McMillan to join the staff team. As soon as lockdown was announced the scheme sadly had to be suspended, and the team found themselves working from home. VASL welcomed Liz in April, and the team began to adapt to a different way of supporting local residents. They instantly supported both their regular clients and their volunteer drivers with phone calls and were also able to help some of their drivers offer support to people in other ways. When VASL teamed up with HDC to support their Covid –19 hub, the team were responsible for dealing with a large number of referrals for local vulnerable residents needing assistance with shopping, dog walking and other needs: working with local groups they directed people to where they could find help. The team have also ensured they had all the information needed for any queries that were received directly from their clients. In addition, drivers from the Car Scheme have been delivering food bank parcels, administered through the Car Scheme for HDC.

The team are continuing to work from home, offering support and advice, and are hoping to get the transport scheme back up and running as soon as it is safe to do so.

They are in constant touch with their wonderful volunteer drivers and have arranged outdoor meetings (that adhere to all the guidelines) both for the team and for their drivers.

Thanks to funding from the Lottery, the Car Scheme is also providing Activity Bags to those who are particularly vulnerable, from sourcing all the products to distributing

the bags. 40 are being sent out in the first instance with a further 210 planned.

Amazing!





2020 started well for Community Champions, with having taken on responsibility for delivering the Library digital sessions in Market Harborough and Lutterworth. Monthly Community Gatherings with accessible transport were taking place at golf clubs and coffee shops, and were well-attended attracting positive feedback:

“They’re friendly, friendly people, we all mix, you never know who you’re going to sit next to.....I enjoy it”

Monthly newsletters with project updates, community information and event information are sent monthly to both volunteers and clients. “When it comes, I sit and read it right through and I feel, “well, at least I’ve got somebody. I’ve got some friends”

Inter-generational work with Welland Academy and the Scouts also flourished.

Connections were made in villages around Harborough District attracting more clients and volunteers.

Once the team were working from home, they rapidly adapted to a new way of doing things. They quickly embraced Zoom for online Community Gatherings, with Digital volunteers offering to support people to get familiar with Zoom. The CC team adapted the volunteer recruitment process meaning training could be done online, amazing! During the pandemic 80 CC volunteers have been ringing, emailing and writing to clients offering regular social contact. 15 volunteer- client pairs are now also making Doorstop or Garden visits which allow safe face to face connection.

The Community Champions team produced their Impact Report for 2019 / 2020 which is on our website for all, it provides incredible reading showing how many people the project has helped.

Between July 2019 – June 2020 we have supported 226 relationships, including 43 face to face befriending, 78 telephone befriending and 23 Email/Pen Pal relationships.

50 people have been supported to develop and use their digital skills.

Run 13 learning events with 157 attendees

Involved 80 active volunteers providing an estimated £109 535 worth of time.





Activity group suspended mid-March due to Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, fortnightly (sometimes weekly) phone calls and texts to all the young carers and their families. These have been calls to check on mental health and well-being, to help sort out practical arrangements (free school meal vouchers, food parcels, reduced utility bills, school work etc) and to listen and offer encouragement to the young people and their families during this difficult and uncertain time.

We sent out positivity postcards to all the young carers in the first fortnight of lockdown and we have produced a monthly newsletter for the young people which features news, support information, quizzes, recipes, photos of what they are all doing to keep busy, and ideas to keep occupied. Bags of Happiness (featuring goodies aimed at boosting their mental health and wellbeing) were hand-delivered to 14 young carers, giving us another opportunity to connect with them and check on how they are all doing.

From the beginning of June we started running Zoom young carers sessions and on the first meeting we had 8 of our young people take part. We played bingo with them and there were lots of laughs and chatting. The Zoom sessions will continue on a fortnightly basis until the group can meet up properly again. It will provide a real opportunity to keep the young carers and staff connected. and we're planning, amongst other things: Quizzes, Guest speakers, Play Your Cards Right, Scavenger hunt and Baking.

For the period 1st January – 16th June 2020

Number of active young carers: 18

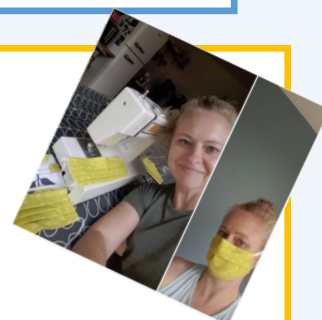
Number of attendances: 52

Number of activity groups run: 4

Trips - Tamworth Snowdome (3.1.20): 7 young people, Corby Go

Karting Track (22.02.20): 9 young people

Bags of Happiness deliveries: 14



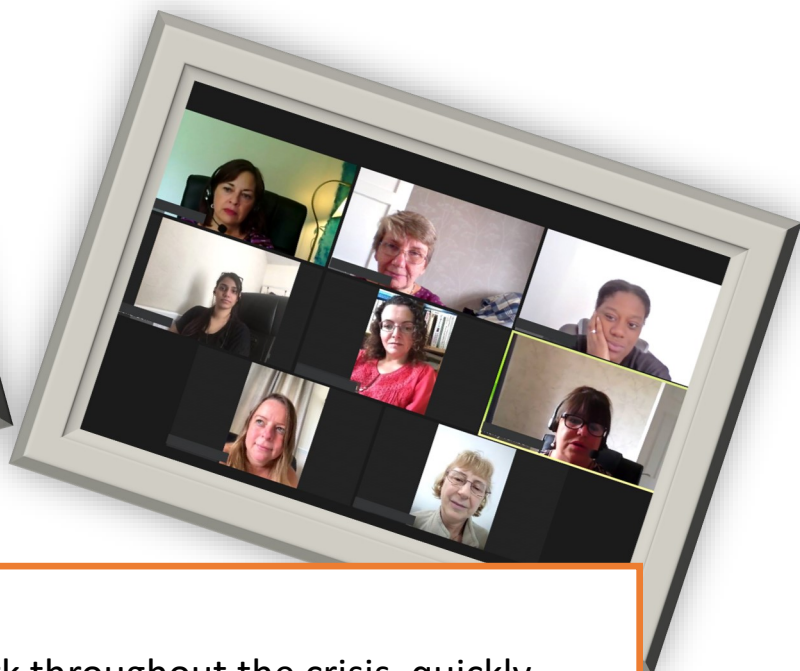


The MMM Project faced closing their regular clubs such as Music Therapy, Tennis club, Ngage and Animal Pet Therapy. They quickly adapted to support all clients over the phone, and set up online groups to help those who were suffering as a result of the Covid Pandemic. Cases of Mental Health referrals have increased greatly.



In July 2020, Debbie Harnett left VASL for a new challenge, and so we recruited for the role using Zoom interviews and personal telephone calls. We were delighted to appoint Pritisha Gohil as the My Mind Matters Project Manager. Pritisha was working for LCC on the Work.Live.Leicestershire project that was created to support those who are economically inactive and unemployed overcome barriers into training, employment and wellbeing. Before that Pritisha had spent many years working in Mental Health support within the NHS. Pritisha is now working from home and is already developing and planning for MMM, with a strong emphasis on getting clients back into the community with the help of her team Sarah Watson and new recruit Samantha Burgess who we were also delighted to bring on board.

MMM services have continued online, and these have been received well. Weekly Engage meetings happen via Zoom, Sarah has held quizzes and we are hoping to have some social distanced Meetings arranged soon.



VASL STAFF

VASL staff have continued to work throughout the crisis, quickly adapting to working from home and creatively within teams to ensure all projects maintained the valuable support.

Thanks to Maureen securing funding from The National Lottery Trust, we were able to supply staff with all the equipment they needed to work from home, and we are so proud of every member of staff.

Supporting staff has always been a priority of VASL, and more so during these times. Thanks to our Staff Wellbeing funding, we were able to give each staff member a choice of gift as a thank you, and to show how grateful we are.

We have remained in regular contact via Zoom meetings, some social distanced team gatherings in the park and are arranging an online Quiz for all staff. It has been very strange not to see each other in the office but we have made sure we keep connected.

Huge thank you to Jenny Young and Hannah Currington who have worked so hard ensuring our Social Media platforms are relevant, helpful and ensure our followers know we are very much still here to help.

