

VASL

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Your Local Charity Improving Lives

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**SUPPORT
FOR CARERS**
LEICESTERSHIRE

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.



COMMUNITY
CHAMPIONS

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

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**YOUNG CARERS
PROJECT**

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

ANNUAL REVIEW 2019

How did we get to 2020? Wow 20 years since the Millennium, when we all wondered what the new century would bring. Well some things haven't changed and that is that VASL is still here thriving and providing vital support to numerous members of our community.

2019, as is always the case was challenging for many reasons, not least the uncertainty of the tender process for our much needed and fantastic family carers project, 'Support for Carers Leicestershire'. We were thrilled to learn in August that we had won the tender and will continue to run this vital service on behalf of Leicestershire County Council. This is great news for VASL, all of our staff but more importantly the family carers who we support on a regular basis. It may be a bit of information they need or a complex situation needing a visit from one of our staff. Whatever is required to support the family carer we are here to help.

During the year to enable VASL as a whole to remain on budget, the board had to make some tough decisions and we lost two staff through redundancy. These staff were part of the team that kept the nuts and bolts of the organisation turning and alleviated some of the pressure on our project staff. Following a full and in depth review it was agreed that to allow us to keep maximum support to front line projects, serving the community, some back-office savings had to be made.

It was a difficult and sad time; however, we are now in a strong position to go into the New Year with projects and services securely funded.

As Charity Manager I am conscious every day, of the strain on the Health and Social Care services. Funding is very difficult with a growing elderly population, and at the end of 2019 we were able to discuss our concerns for future funding support with Market Harborough and the Bowden's Charity. After hearing about our decreasing funding support from Health, Social Care and other Statutory agencies, we were encouraged to make an application. We are delighted that Market Harborough and the Bowden's Charity have awarded VASL, 5 years funding towards running costs. It will help towards rent and other overheads. To say we were pleased is an understatement and it will now allow VASL to look and address some more of the real needs in our community. VASL wouldn't be VASL without the amazing volunteers who give up their time and commitment to support our projects.

A big thank you to all our Trustees, Staff, Volunteers and of course our funders who all play such an important role in keeping VASL surviving and thriving in this coming year and many years ahead, I hope.

Maureen

Charity Manager



SUPPORT FOR CARERS LEICESTERSHIRE



2019 A very successful Year for Support for Carers Leicestershire!

The first part of 2019 focused on our Tender for the Leicestershire Carers Support Service, and we were delighted to be awarded this in August. The process involved a lot of work, but has secured the fantastic service offered to carers across all districts of Leicestershire for at least the next 2 years. As a result changes were made within the team to meet new requirements and new members of staff have been welcomed into our experienced team.

District work and carers Groups

The new contract has brought some changes and the Support For Carers team will now have a representative responsible for 1 of 7 districts. We are implementing not only the monthly day-time Carers groups, but also evening groups which will be up and running in early 2020.

These groups offer support and advice to carers along with an opportunity to meet with other carers, have time to themselves and make friends. Feedback is always positive.

We will also be implementing Carers Clinics throughout 2020.



VASL SFC Continue to provide Carers Assessments to ensure that Carers in Leicestershire have access to all the financial and social support they are entitled to. The team complete these forms online for carers and receive a number of referrals for carers needing help.

We have continued to build relationships with GP Practices, Promotional stands have been used and we have started to work with Social Prescribers who can also make referrals.

Many of these partnerships have become very strong.



During 2019 the VASL SFC database had over 9000 carers, and received an average of 350 referrals every month.



Our **Telephone Befriending Service**

continues to offer support and a break from their caring responsibilities, particularly those carers who are isolated. We have 19 volunteers who support over 120 carers.

'I feel very upset at times, but after the call things don't seem so bad. I get so lonely and I enjoy a chat with someone who just hears what I say'



Special Events 2019

We were nominated for the Leicestershire Recognition Awards sponsored by the Leicester Mercury. A fantastic achievement.

We organised a Hinkley Carers Week event, this was an informative event attended by a number of organisations offering talks and information. There was also a social element as we had afternoon tea, laughter yoga and time for carers to socialise.

In November VASL SFC organised and hosted the Carers rights Event, this was a very successful event, we had a number of other carers support groups provided advice, and support along with a friendly face.





An extremely professional facility, was very impressed and would recommend it to anyone. My injury has now healed so I am now able to drive, but I would have no hesitation in using VASL again.



Our Car scheme has experienced another busy year with increasing demand for the service. Thanks to our Volunteers we are continuing to support a huge number of Clients in the Harborough district.

In 2019 we hosted a Volunteer Christmas party to thank them for their hard work,

'I drive because I really enjoy it, and it gives me something useful to do for myself and my community. I get to meet some lovely people and chat about all sorts. And the VASL transport staff and volunteer drivers are very special people to work with'

'Being non-drivers of a mature age, the scheme provides a very reliable door to door service, especially at the times when the public transport system offers a very limited time table'

Our project highlight of 2019 is recruiting 15 new volunteer drivers, making our total numbers of drivers 62!



We have 1757 clients

Our drivers travelled 88126 miles

And completed 6187 passenger journeys

As I do not drive anymore due to poor eyesight—it means that I am not totally dependant on my husband who is still working. It enables me to get our of MH to pursue my favourite hobby, painting. It means I am meeting lovely groups of like minded friends.

A wonderful service, would be lost without it, Thank you VASL!





2019 Achievements

- 1:1 active relationships = 97
- Digital Clients helped = 44
- Telephone Befrienders = 8
- Email or Letter writers = 9
- Community Gathering Attendees = 374
- Training Events Attendees = 68

Community Champions Highlights 2019



Digital Volunteers deliver one to one digital support for older people at home ; from October 2019 they have also started offering **individual digital support at a monthly session in Market Harborough and Lutterworth libraries** . *“Take up at MH library has been fantastic and it is wonderful to offer this community-based service”* reflected Jenny, who co-ordinates Digital volunteers.

In 2019 as well as monthly Community Gatherings for 40 volunteers, clients and staff we ran **non-transport Community Gatherings** in cafes in Market Harborough. These encourage people to get there independently. *“ I like these smaller gatherings. I can hear what is going on and I have already met some new people”*



Intergenerational work – Community Champions (CC) has a thriving partnership with Welland Park Academy. 10 clients went to the Mc Millan coffee morning and enjoyed eating the cakes students had baked and talking to students. 40 clients and volunteers were beauty fully hosted by students from different year groups at the Christmas Gathering. They served drinks, chatted and performed songs and carols. *“ It was so interesting learning about how Welland Park has changed” said one student” I can’t believe they never used to wear uniforms!”*

CC has also started working with 3 Scout Troops in Market Harborough. 9 older people and Rohini met with 3 different Scout troops and explained why they were involved in the project. The Scouts then shared information about activities they had done through the Scouts , like participating in exciting international camps, completing orienteering, cooking and team work badges. Such inter-generational dialogue brings mutual benefits.” *I love being around the energy of young people – when are we seeing them again?*



CC has strong **partnerships** with local organisations – in 2019 we worked with **Leicestershire Adult Learning Service (LALS)** to organise awareness -raising events about the urgency of Reducing Plastic Use. These workshops are now being run for other community organisations including a Parish Council, school students and youth groups. People are changing their consumer habits and becoming advocates for sustainability. In another piece of partnership work CC worked with **Leicestershire County Council** to produce a Loneliness Guide and website. We shared the real- life experiences of clients in the CC project, and their ideas for what had helped them re-integrate into the community and start developing a local social network. This co-production values people’s individual journeys into and out of loneliness.



CC has also made wider connections in **rural areas** ; Sam has been to talk to WI groups in Northamptonshire villages, visited coffee mornings in local village halls and written articles for rural websites and newsletters. These are attracting volunteers and clients to the project from across the District and beyond.



VASL Young Carers provide Young Carers aged 11-18 years from the Harborough district with an evening activity group and trips during the school holidays. Our aims are to reduce loneliness and isolation, increase enjoyment and fun, and improve emotional well-being. We are funded by Children in Need, with support from some small local charities and businesses, and Leicestershire County Council 'Children and Families Well-being Service.

FORTNIGHTLY ACTIVITY GROUPS

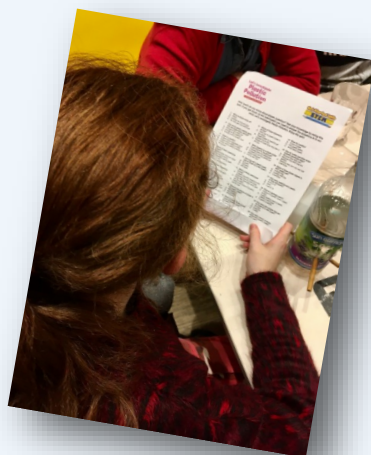
Our fortnightly activity groups take place at The Cube in Market Harborough, and provides a safe space for the young people to relax, have fun and socialise with others in similar situations. There is also support from experienced and professional youth workers.

New for 2019 are the 'opt in' activities for young people to take part in if they wish. These have included baking and cooking, arts and crafts and reusing plastics. The young people are encouraged to have a say in the planning of these activities and therefore the uptake has been.

Young people are also able to talk about any issues they are having with friends or on a one-to-one basis with one of the professionals.

'Everyone here just gets it. People are friendly. No-one is judgy like they are at school'

Since May 2019 we have had 15 new referrals to the group, which is an increase on the average 6 referrals in previous years.



GROUP TRIPS—2019

2019 has been a great Year for Young Carers, as well as our fortnightly activity group sessions we have run at least one trip per school holiday;

May —Pizza Express Lunch Trip

July —Explore More event at Loughborough University

August —Rutland Aquapark trip

October —Midlands Arena Roller skating and Lunch Trip

December —Christmas meal out

Without the YC Group these young people would not have the opportunity to go on trips, and we they have developed confidence and great friendships with others going through similar experiences.



We are the only project in Leicestershire who offer transport to our young people to ensure that they can access the respite sessions. We can only do this thanks to our team of wonderful volunteer drivers and chaperones who give up their time to pick up and drop off the young carers every fortnight. We organise two annual volunteer parties to ensure the volunteers feel valued and supported , without them projects like ours could not provide the support. Thank You!





The Mental Health wellbeing support programme We have set up partnerships with local community groups to provide a programme of daily activities which are shown to improve and maintain wellbeing. These have been very popular and are supporting clients to access the community and empowering them to continue to remain engaged



Monday—Music Therapy. Members of the group meet to listen and make music. With the support of a professional musician we are creating and writing a song with the aim to have this recorded and played on local radio.

Tuesday—Tea and Cake—Supporting clients to access the community at local coffee mornings.

Tuesday— Tennis Club.. Promoting positive and healthy activities with a qualified Tennis Coach. *We will be having an exciting formal Launch of this in April 2020!*

Wednesday—Walk & Talk. Organised Mindful walks around the local area. Enjoy the countryside and feel better.

Thursday—N:gage. Local support group led by volunteers, offering an opportunity for peer to peer engagement, socialising, playing games, pool and chat. A welcoming group for those who might find meeting new people a challenge and to learn new skills.

Friday—Animal Pet Therapy. With the help from Pet Therapy UK, we provide sessions where people can spend time with the wonderful dog 'chippy', enjoying and feeling the benefits of pet therapy.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Workshops

Our Monthly workshops have continued to be successful and attended regularly by clients. The aim and ethos of the workshops continues to promote positive mental health through activity based discussions and peer to peer support and social inclusion.

Some of the topics we have covered are;

- **Building Positive connections**
- **Self-esteem and self care**
- **Emotional Regulation**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Food and Mood**
- **Building mental health resilience**



'It meant I can talk to other people with similar problems and don't feel Like I am on my own'

'It explained so many thoughts and feelings that I have been experiencing'

Mental Health Forum During October we held our first Mental Health Professionals Forum. We have recognised the need for further multi agent working with the district and having a forum for professionals to be able to share services and the difficulties of working with those with mental health diagnosis. The proved to be a very informative and will be organised and hosted by MMM every quarter.

We have also held a client feedback day at our offices. This was a very positive day with clients having the opportunity to meet with our Commissioner and give feedback on the projects. With heart-warming feedback and the request for increased frequency of workshops which is something we are looking into.





VASL are excited about 2020 and the so many people we will be supporting. We are a small charity run by the passion and experience of 18 part time staff. But VASL could not run without the time and support we receive from our fantastic Volunteers and trustees, so **THANK YOU!**



Words from the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Linda Jones CBE

2019 has been a challenging but exciting time for VASL. We showed our resilience by riding out the 'storms', particularly the extended period of re-tendering for the Support for Carers Contract and the need to reduce staffing in Business Support to enable maximum resources to go to the delivery of frontline services. The managers and staff responded positively to these challenges and we emerged as strong as ever.

As the Annual Review shows there have been many successes in the projects, and it demonstrates their priority to deliver high quality services to all of our users. The commitment, dedication, knowledge and skills of our staff is clearly evident. They are supported by around 150 volunteers who give of their time so generously to help us make a difference to people's lives. Our thanks to them. We could not deliver the range and number of services without them.

Whilst there have been financial challenges in the year - like for many voluntary and community sector organisations – the sound financial acumen of our Charity Manager, Staff and Trustees have ensured that evidence based, sometimes tough, decision making has enabled us to continue to thrive and ensure sustainability and resilience.

I would like to thank our Charity Manager, Maureen O'Malley for her excellent leadership and management throughout another year, and to all of our staff.

I want to thank our Board of Trustees. They provide clear strategic thinking and decision making. I have appreciated their ready and active engagement in the work of VASL. My role as Chair would be much more difficult without their sound advice, help and support. The work of the Board was recognised this year when I received the award of Trustee of the Year 2019 in the inaugural VALL (Voluntary Awards Leicester and Leicestershire) Awards organised by Voluntary Action Leicestershire. I appreciated the recognition of my contribution but it is equally a reflection on the work of the Board, Managers, Staff and Volunteers. Well done and thank you.

We look forward with optimism to the new decade and the further development of VASL, serving the communities in Harborough and wider Leicestershire.

Linda Jones

