



Community Champions Year Five Impact Report

*“Thank you for the inspiration, confidence,
friendship, learning and a feeling of
power. We can do things.”*



October 2022

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1. Introduction

About our monitoring processes

Community Champions undertakes client monitoring each year using distance travelled measures that have been designed specifically for the project, including use of the Government-recommended loneliness measures of the UCLA scale and the single loneliness question¹.

The measures have been adapted slightly over the years as we have learned about what has and hasn't worked. In year four we took the decision to reduce the number of questions we were asking because the priority was supporting clients through the crisis of Covid, but we kept what we felt were the key measures of success of our project, reported below.

This report covers the period July 2021 – September 2022, as there was an extension on the final year due to reallocating the budget. We normally aim to monitor 40 clients at the end of each year, however this year that has been challenging, clients have died or gone into hospital or residential care, so we have 17 clients who completed the end of year monitoring, and 55 for whom we have baseline data. This does mean that any numerical monitoring is not as robust as we would like, and some of the before and after measurements are averages across surveys rather than tracking the same individual, but taken along with the qualitative questions in client interviews and the volunteer survey we hope it builds up a picture of the impact of our services.

We are disappointed that we have not been able to gather more client annual data to give us more robust results. We are exploring if there are more client-friendly measures we can use to track the individual journeys of clients through the project. We are aware that asking baseline and annual questions provide a snapshot of how the client is feeling that day and results could be very different on another day, or even the same day at a different time. We plan to attend a Campaign to End Loneliness seminar to explore if there are ways of measuring changes in the experience of transient versus chronic loneliness.

¹ See

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/compendium/nationalmeasurementofloneliness/2018/recommendednationalindicatorsof_loneliness

2. Community Champions activities summary

Face to Face

- Monthly Community Gathering at a local café or school with free accessible transport from home to venue, and back.
- Monthly digital library session at Market Harborough and Lutterworth libraries (from March 2022).
- Befriending and digital home visits.
- Three two-hour training sessions to become a Volunteer Guide.
- Two-hour course on Conversational Skills.
- Two two-hour Platinum Jubilee Memories workshops run in partnership with Adult Learning and Leicestershire County Council's Culture Team, memories captured on a website www.cultureleicestershire.co.uk/market-harborough-jubilee-workshops/
- Party to celebrate achievements of Community Champions first project and transfer to Community Champions two, with 55 stakeholders attending and superb feedback.
- Volunteer's cream tea and social events.
- Two x one and a half-hour Steering Group meetings with lots of ideas for project development suggested by stakeholders.
- Weekly breakfast club led by volunteer.

Online

- Monthly mini-Zoom for clients facilitated by volunteer, with a monthly conversational theme based on events, memories or nature photos.
- Monthly Zoom book club led by volunteer.
- Closed Facebook Group.
- Learning events.

3. Community Champions in numbers

Figures for July 2021 to September 2022.

37 new clients

55 new relationships (51 befriending and 4 pen pals and email)

152 active relationships

83 active volunteers

56 new digital relationships

78 people have become “Community Friends”, pairs who now have an ongoing friendship and meet outside of the project (13 new in year five)

Changes over the last five years

The table below shows changes in some key figures over four years, with our digital numbers affected this year by Covid (see page eight for more information).

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Years 1-5 % change
Number of clients	71	89	146	186	152	114%
Active volunteers	54	72	79	94	83	54%
Clients supported to connect digitally	29	30	50	8	41	41%

4. Client monitoring and project outcomes

Why do people join Community Champions?

“I didn't know what to expect when I joined, but the project has been marvellous and made such a difference.”

We ask clients why they joined Community Champions, which helps us to focus the project on individual needs.

Isolated due to health or disability	          
Having few friends or acquaintances	          
Being new to the area	    
Bereavement	    
Lack of contact with family who live away or are busy	   
Not getting out much / wanting to get out more	   
Not seeing anyone to talk to regularly	  
Became isolated because of caring responsibilities	  
Wanting to talk to someone outside family	
Isolated due to Covid	
Isolated due to low mood	
Split from partner	

Other comments that people made to us in relation to their loneliness and isolation included,

- **Not being part of any clubs** and finding it difficult to make friends
- **Loss of confidence** leading to not going out
- **Friends and relatives having died** sometimes leaving people completely isolated, sometimes leaving them with only acquaintances

- **Not being able to get to communal areas** because of health problems when people are living in retirement properties or simple barriers such as doors that are too heavy to open from a wheelchair

Some clients that were assessed did not become part of the project, reasons included severe mental health conditions, dementia, or the person's death.

Why do volunteers think that people have become lonely?

Volunteers were asked this question in their annual survey.

Physical and practical factors include:

- Health issues and disabilities
- Bereavement, which may be linked to living alone

"I find the main reason seems to be the death of a partner or close friend leaving them without an 'anchor'."

- Being a carer
- Living away from family
- Being reliant on others for transport

Psychological and social factors:

- Being unwilling to speak to neighbours and vice versa
- Lack of willingness to contact village organisations
- Learning difficulty and social awareness challenges
- Lack of contact with others affecting psychological state

"Perhaps the fact they do not often have the chance to discuss all sorts of things with somebody."

"Feeling life has ended...feeling worthless."

Interestingly, the impact of Covid did not feature significantly in most of the answers from volunteers this year.

Project outcomes: what has changed for clients because of Community Champions?

"It has been a great match with my volunteer. We always have lots to talk about and end up laughing about everything."

The following section reports changes against the outcomes identified in the original bid, some of these are more limited than previous years because of the decisions

made to reduce the monitoring to provide more practical support during Covid and its recovery.

Outcome one: older people experience reduced loneliness and increased social and digital connection

1.1 Number of older beneficiaries who have learned how to connect with others online, target 30 beneficiaries each year.

Community Champions has exceeded the target set, with 56 clients, 34 home-based and 22 visiting us at the library.

Volunteers' comments demonstrate the range of digital activities that are undertaken:

"We found a fix for G so that she can answer calls by tapping the phone icon. We went through managing storage on WhatsApp and deleting photos from conversations."

"She has mastered texting, and I have left her practising her photographic techniques, she can also send photos to friends and family. She has achieved all she wanted and needs practice."

"E is dragging pictures we have taken of her garden into a plant finder app. She wanted to relearn the names of the plants in her garden, and this was the best way we worked out that she could do it herself. She is renaming the picture files with the plant names as we go."

Digital volunteering in numbers

Active digital volunteers	10
Number of home-based clients	34
Number of home-based sessions	77
Number of library-based clients	22
Number of library sessions (two per month re-started March 2022)	13
Number of appointments at the library	43

Initially some one-to-one sessions were held over the phone, but gradually people's confidence has increased, and all one-to-one sessions are now in homes.

Fourteen of the home-based clients only needed one session, but other clients have either long term help or come back for several 'one off' sessions during the year.

The library sessions started again in February 2022, with one held November 2021. Most library clients attend more than once.

The needs that people are most commonly looking for help with include:

- People with new smartphones or tablets needing to know the basics.
- Connecting Smart TVs to broadband and help with logging in to apps such as BBC app for iPlayer.
- Supporting people to adapt to developing medical conditions, for example sight loss, memory recovery following a stroke.
- Accessing Utility apps so that lower prices are available.
- Using Zoom to enable clients to join the various online events we hold.

Sharing our expertise with others

In August we were approached by Northamptonshire Carers who wanted advice with setting up drop-in digital sessions. A member of staff will be attending our October library session to observe. Experience is also shared with other befriending organisations at the quarterly Leicestershire Befriending Network meetings.

1.2 Number of older beneficiaries who identify that the quality of their relationships with other people have improved, target 40 beneficiaries each year.

This is no longer measured as a quantitative indicator after we reduced the monitoring in year three as people were having difficulty responding to all the questions. However, comments from clients illustrate that Community Champions is delivering this for participants.

“I feel close to Community Champions as a group of people and feel part of the VASL community, staff always make time.”

“The best thing feeling you are part of the community. I love the Gatherings and enjoy the Zooms. I know there is always someone that you can phone.”

“I very much enjoyed the visits. It made a real difference to my life and how I was feeling, I got on really well with the volunteer and enjoyed their company.”

1.3 Number of older beneficiaries who identify that they have increased connections with people other than Community Champions staff, volunteers or participants

Clients are asked how often they meet up with people in person, speak on the phone or internet, or email, write or text message.

As previous years, the frequency of contact that people have had has increased, and feelings of loneliness decreased.

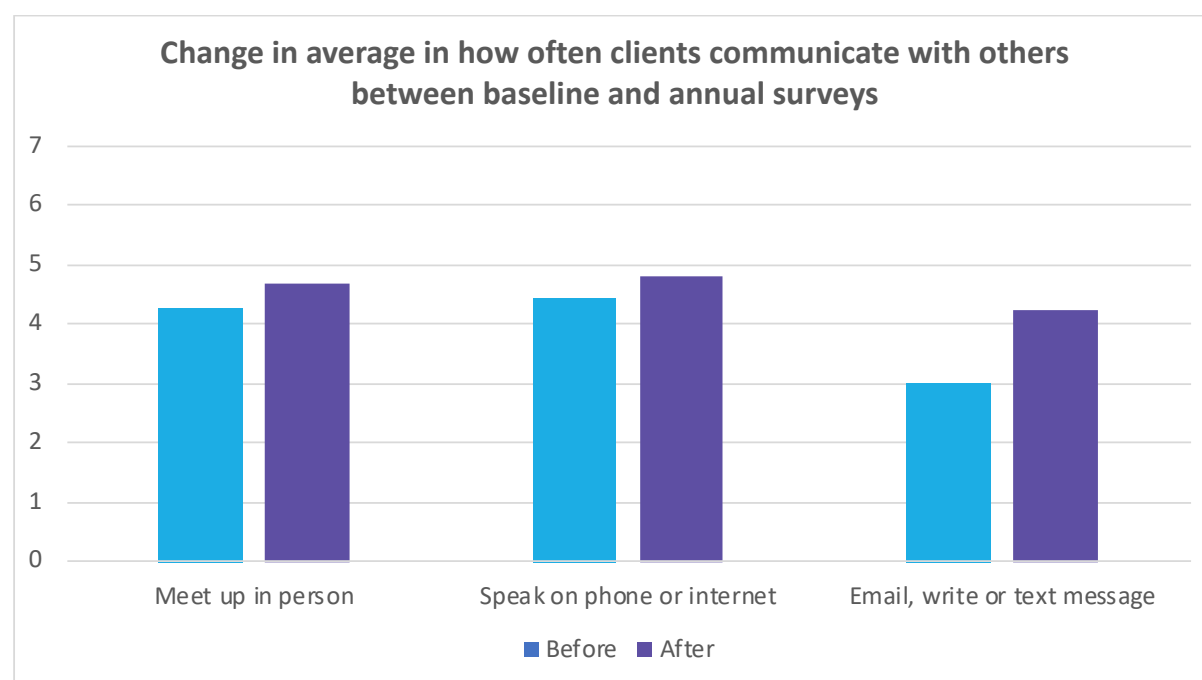
Frequency of contact

This question about how often people have contact with others is intended to measure the objective experience of isolation.

The scale is: 1-less than once every two months; 2-once every two months; 3-once a month; 4-a few times a month; 5-once or twice a week; 6-three or more times a week; 7-every day or almost every day.

For each method of contact, clients have on average **increased** from the baseline surveys at the beginning of the year to the annual survey at the end.

Changes over the five years



Benchmarking against national scores

Comparison between VASL's monitoring and the Community Life Survey². Figures for 2019/20 have been included as well to demonstrate pre-Covid levels.

These benchmarks show that Community Champions potential and actual clients are more isolated than the national averages.

² See tables at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202021>

Percentage of people who undertake these activities once a week or more

	CC client baseline	CC client annual	Community Life 2020/21	Community Life 2019/20
Meet up in person	38%	44%	66%	74%
Speaking on phone, video or audio call	53%	69%	85%	81%
Email write or text message	25%	50%		
Email or write	-	-	37%	37%
Exchange texts or instant messages	-	-	86%	84%

What percentage of clients have increased contact?

The tables below show the percentage of Community Champions clients who say that they have increased contact through the different methods over the course of the year. The in-person frequency has improved but is still being affected by Covid compared to previous years.

In person – number of clients who have increased contact

Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	Year five
62%	71%	67%	28%	38%

Phone or internet – number of who have increased contact

Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	Year five
38%	38%	53%	21%	50%

Email, write or text – number of clients who have increased contact

Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	Year five
43%	33%	64%	14%	66%

Outcome two: older people experience an increase in mental and emotional wellbeing, including feeling more positive and more useful

UCLA loneliness scores

Community Champions has adopted the Governments recommended measures of the UCLA three-point scale and the single loneliness question since year three.

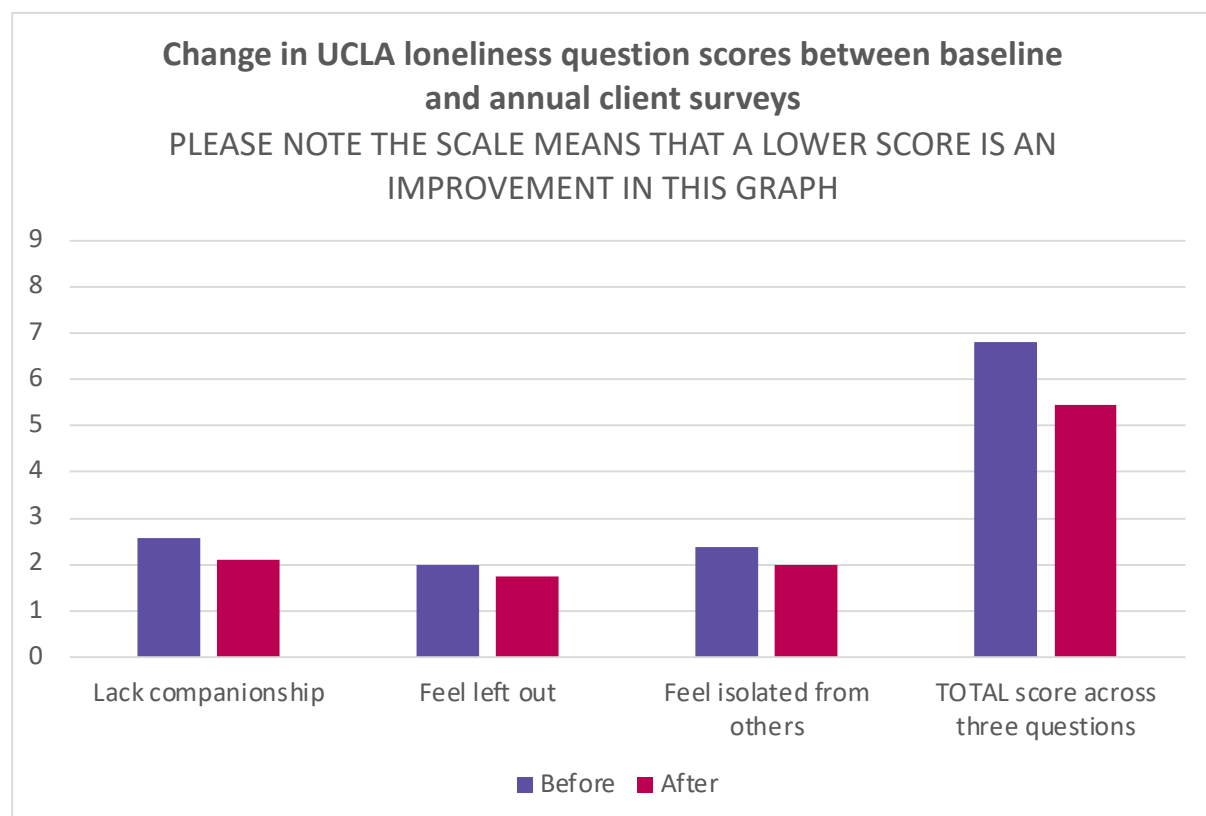
The three questions plus the overall score have on average **improved** from the baseline surveys at the beginning of the year to the annual survey at the end.

The UCLA scale asks three questions:

1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
2. How often do you feel left out?
3. How often do you feel isolated from others?

The response scale is: 1-hardly ever; 2-some of the time; 3-often

PLEASE NOTE: unlike the previous and next questions, a reduction in score indicates an improvement for these questions. The final two bars on the graph



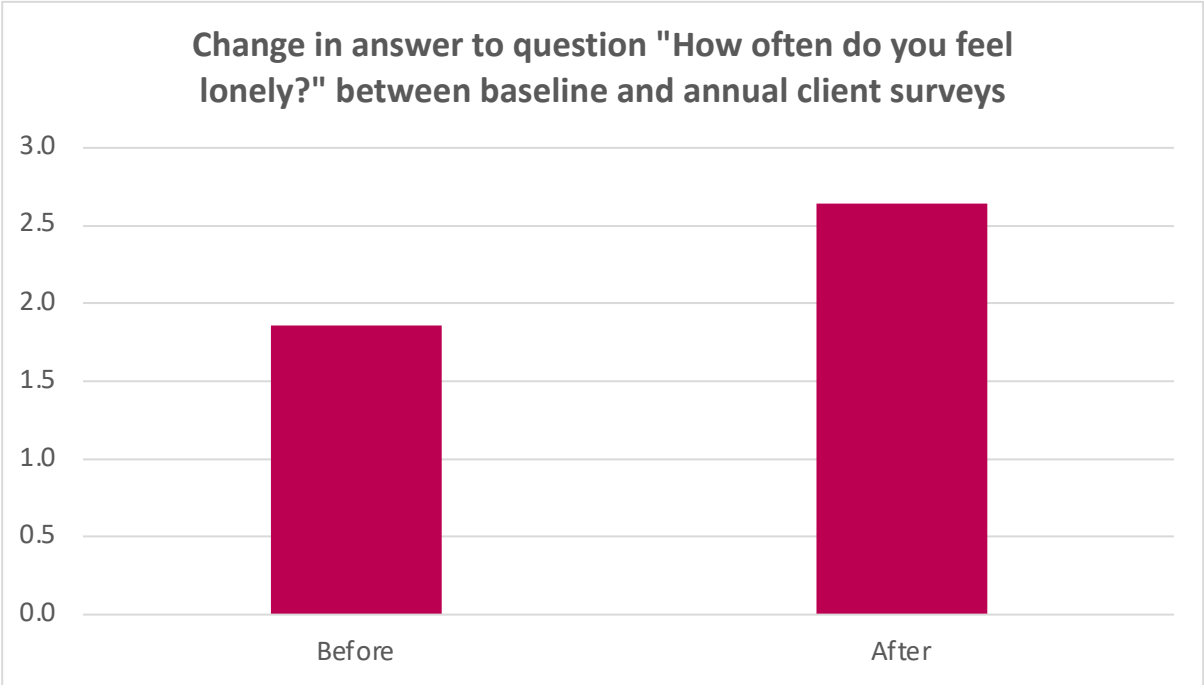
above are composed of the total of the scores for the three measures with a maximum of nine and a minimum of three.

Single loneliness question

This is a further part of the Government’s recommended questions, “How often do you feel lonely?”

the response scale is: 1-often/always; 2-some of the time; 3-occasionally; 4-hardly ever; 5-never

The overall score for this question has on average **improved** from the baseline surveys at the beginning of the year to the annual survey at the end.



Changes from last year

In comparison to last year, the table below shows the percentage of clients who showed improvements against each measure.

	More companionship	Feeling less left out	Feel less isolated	Improved total UCLA score ³	Feel less lonely
Year 3	50%	69%	46%	62%	44%
Year 4	55%	45%	43%	52%	59%
Year 5	50%	38%	44%	58%	50%

Benchmarking against national scores

Again, benchmarking against the Community Life Survey as for the previous section demonstrates that Community Champions actual and potential clients express more loneliness and isolation than the national average.

Answering often or always to the statements below

	CC client baseline	CC client annual	Community Life 2020/21	Community Life 2019/20
Lack companionship	58%	20%	12%	11%
Feel left out	19%	13%	10%	10%
Feel isolated from others	44%	13%	12%	11%
Feel lonely	54%	9%	6%	6%

What do clients like best about Community Champions?

Responses were similar to last year:

- **Relationship with their volunteer,**
 “I get on well with my volunteer and enjoy my time with her each week, I wish it was longer.”
- **Having someone to talk to,**

³ This is adding up the answers to the previous three questions

“I have a visitor who comes fairly regularly, we have plenty to talk about.”

“I like the friendliness of everyone and being able to communicate.”

- **Meeting new people,**

“It's been great, it's really helped having someone to talk to, we have lots to talk about. I enjoy Community Gatherings and meeting new people at them.”

- **Something to look forward to,**

“It gives me something to look forward to. I get on well with my volunteer and I feeling part of a community.”

- **Community Gatherings and other events,**

I've really enjoyed being part of Community Champions, everyone is really nice, I enjoy the events, I think they are doing a very good job helping older people.

- **Improvement in mood,**

It cheers me up when the phone rings and it gives me someone to talk to.

“I really like my telephone befriender she is a really nice lady. It bucks you up to hear the phone ring when you're feeling down.

Outcome three: older people have improved confidence, can deal better with problems and are more likely to engage with community activities

Clients described how involvement with the project had helped them to regain confidence or be more involved in other activities. This included:

- Taking a “Steady Steps” course in their retirement complex.
- Improving speech through speaking to volunteers.
- Being able to use the computer on their own.
- Attending Age Concern events.

Outcome four: older people are more involved in the design and delivery of activities to reduce loneliness

Community Champions steering group

The steering group has continued to operate this year with a mix of clients, volunteers and community partners. Topics that have been discussed to influence the way in which Community Champions operates include:

- How to attract more volunteers.
- How to support unmatched clients.
- Potential new venues for Community Gatherings and suggestions for speakers.
- The pleasure clients and volunteers get from regular inter-generational contact like the Postcard Art Exchange Project, cards made by students and Community Gatherings hosted at Welland Academy
- The model for Community Champions 2; the steering group provided feedback about the design of the Volunteer Guide training and the Next Steps course.

Client annual monitoring

Clients have been asked in the annual monitoring for suggestions for improvements.

As previous years, many clients are happy with whatever Community Champions provides, for example,

“No suggestions really, I enjoy everything I have been offered.”

“I don’t really have any suggestions. I think it is a good project with lots to offer.”

There were some suggestions for how the project could be improved, although mainly personal to the client’s particular situation:

- Visits for people who are currently receiving telephone befriending
- Longer visits from volunteers
- More activities like the Jubilee workshop, listening to people’s stories
- Not wanting to engage digitally and preferring social contact.

Volunteers baseline and annual surveys

Do volunteers feel able to make suggestions about their role and Community Champions activities?

Yes, a lot	6
Yes, a bit	8
No	5
Don't know	4

Volunteers, the majority of whom are over 60, were asked specifically for suggestions about how Community Champions could improve in the baseline and annual surveys, but also mentioned these in responses to other questions. Suggestions included:

Suggestions for Community Champions activities

- Small group events in outlying villages might make things more accessible for clients living outside the town.
- Publicise vacancies in other volunteering opportunities e.g. foodbanks, gardening, shopping for housebound people.
- Outside walks.
- Set up some interest groups so clients can talk to each other about shared hobbies.

Publicity and inclusion

- Making people more aware of the help that's available.
- Continued involvement of younger people.
- More community transport.
- There was a comment about VASL staff being female. There was no further information about why this might be important to the volunteer, but this could have links to how male volunteers and clients may feel represented in the organisation structure.

Wider community engagement

- Encourage neighbours to get involved and restore community spirit. People trapped in their homes should be identified to those that live around them. I suspect people are just not aware as they live their busy lives that they have neighbours that would welcome a ten-minute visit.
- Make sure village / community organisations are known to the client and help to contact them if necessary or if they are willing.
- Keep letting people know the many organisations that can help. Let them know they are not alone.

Developing relationships

- A buddy system matched with own age group.
- As an idea some clients may have friends that cannot get together face to face. Perhaps one or other could be collected and gave a cup of tea in each other's homes
- The letter thing worked well; I would promote that.

Supporting clients to try new things

- Just to encourage people to meet up or phone. Weekly chats on the phone. Take up a hobby. try new things.
- Accompanying a client to an activity to build their confidence and encourage them to attend on their own (as per the new model), but this is dependent on mobility, them being able to access the activity. It is also quite time consuming.

Digital volunteers' group

In addition the digital volunteers' group, most of whom are older people, meet regularly to discuss developments, for example analysing trends in needs such as an increasing need for help with Smart TVs; promoting the project through phone shops; linking in with U3A classes for people who need more individual support; delivering focused sessions around particular technologies; and general promotion for the service.

Meeting expectations

Clients are asked an overall question about whether Community Champions has met their expectations – this enables them to comment on their experience based on what's important to them rather than answering pre-defined questions.

Has Community Champions met your expectations?

Exceeded expectations	   
Completely met expectations	     
Partly met expectations	
Didn't meet expectations	
Didn't know what to expect	   

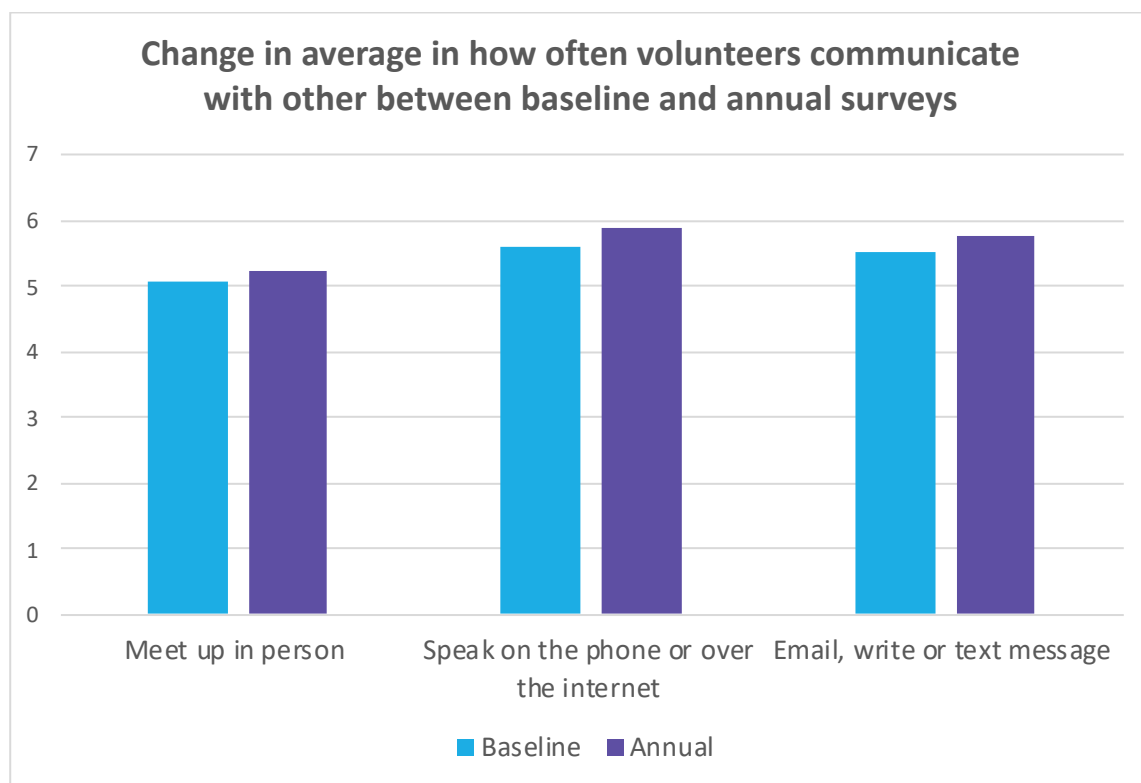
5. Volunteer voices

As well as regular volunteer meetings, debriefings and day-to-day conversations, we have a baseline and annual survey that asks volunteers for their opinions and suggestions about Community Champions. The surveys include the same measures of loneliness and isolation that are used for clients.

Volunteers' experiences of loneliness and isolation

Frequency of contact

This question about how often people have contact with others is intended to measure the objective experience of isolation. The scale is: 1-less than once every two months; 2-once every two months; 3-once a month; 4-a few times a month; 5-once or twice a week; 6-three or more times a week; 7-every day or almost every day.



Volunteers have more contact with people than clients as expected and show slight increases in contact on average between baseline and annual surveys.

UCLA loneliness scores

The UCLA scale asks three questions:

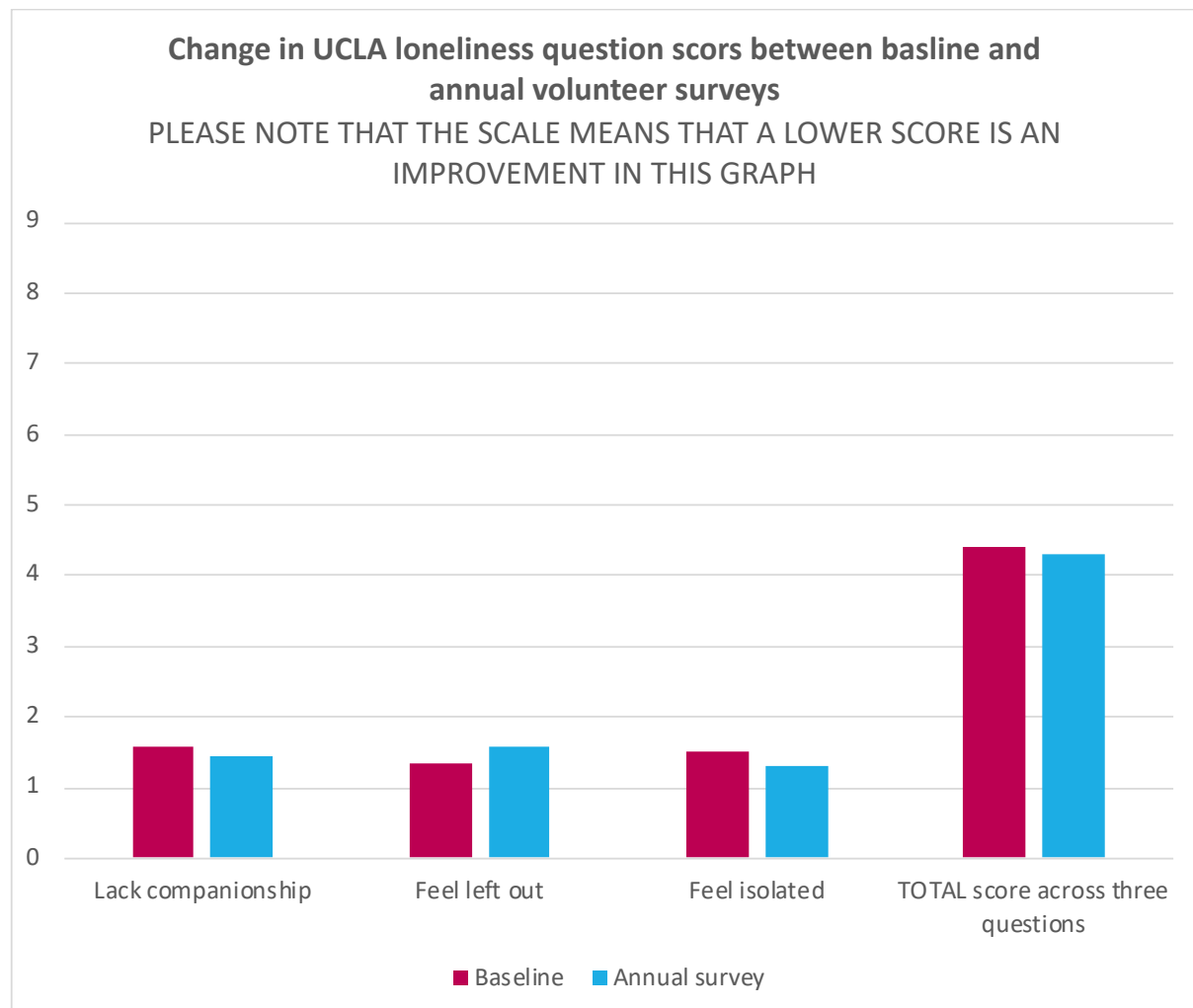
1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
2. How often do you feel left out?

3. How often do you feel isolated from others?

The response scale is: 1-hardly ever; 2-some of the time; 3-often.

The picture is mixed with volunteers, with some slight improvement for lacking companionship and feeling isolated, but a slight worsening of feeling left out.

PLEASE NOTE: unlike the previous and next questions, a reduction in score indicates an improvement for these questions.

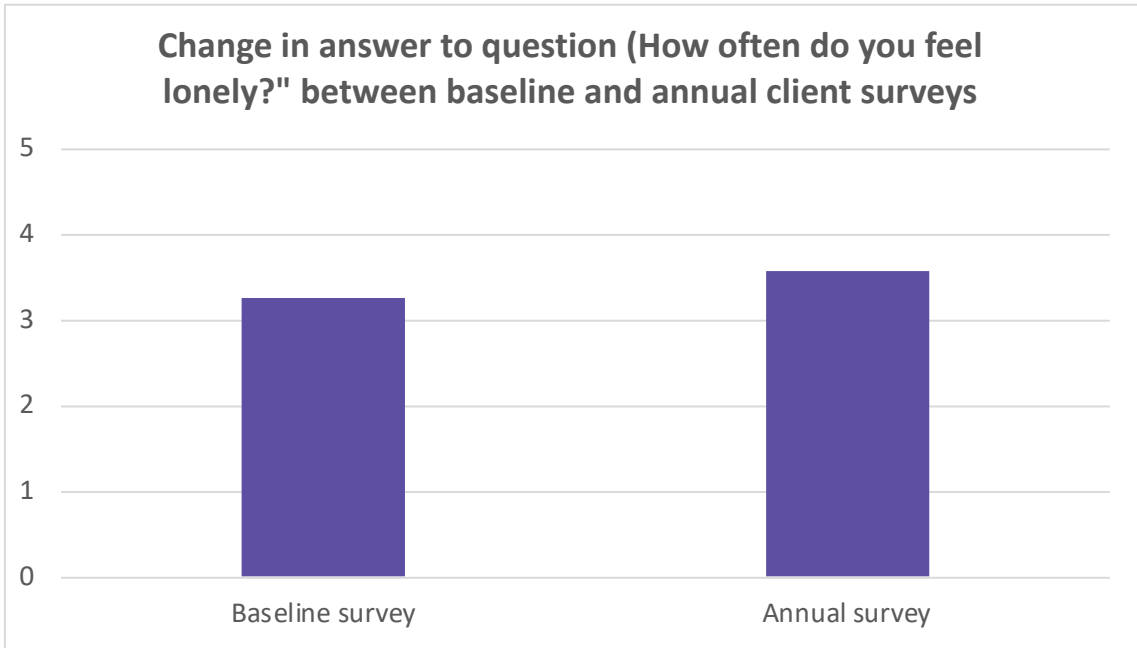


Single loneliness question

This is a further part of the Government's recommended questions, "How often do you feel lonely?"

The response scale is: 1-often/always; 2-some of the time; 3-occasionally; 4-hardly ever; 5-never.

Again there is a very slight improvement.



The impact of community champions on volunteers

A large majority of volunteers who completed the questionnaire are over 60. It was always our intention to offer volunteering as a way for over 60s to relieve or prevent social isolation and loneliness, and the comments in this report indicate that volunteers have found meaning, company and friendship from their experience volunteering with us.

59 years or under	3
60 years or over	19
Prefer not to say	1

Why do volunteers get involved?

Volunteers have a range of motivations for getting involved, similar to those reported in national research⁴ and previous Community Champion surveys.

⁴ For example see <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-national-survey-volunteer-experience/##>

Helping to make a difference to others	"I hope that I can play an active role in the project to combat loneliness in older/vulnerable people in our community, making new friends along the way." "I'd like to contribute to the local community and hopefully make someone smile." "Making a positive difference to somebody's life."
Increasing confidence	"Increase my confidence."
Gaining a sense of fulfilment and purpose	"Personal satisfaction in helping others." "Making myself feel useful."
Meeting people, making friends and engaging with the local community	"Help people in the local community and meet people in market Harborough." "Putting something worthwhile back into the community that has been my home since the pandemic/lockdowns began."
Doing something constructive with time	"Using my spare time constructively."
Using skills and gaining new ones	"Improve my communication skills."
Giving back	"A sense of giving back to the community".
Supporting VASL	"To help VASL continue their great work in the community."

What would volunteers do if they weren't volunteering for VASL?

Volunteer for another project with older people	40%
Volunteer for a project not specifically working with older people	60%

Undertake more social or leisure activities	40%
Nothing	7%
Don't know	7%

Volunteers' view of the impact of Community Champions on their clients

Volunteers were asked how they thought Community Champions had made a difference for clients. The table below shows the main themes.

Improving technological skills	"I think that in a small way Community Champions brings hope that life for her can get better as we explore together the possibilities available via the internet to improve her access to the outside world."
Bringing hope and positivity	"Help them during Covid from being completely isolated and given them encouragement to stay positive."
Reducing loneliness and isolation and helping people to feel a part of something	"An opportunity to meet someone new and share life experiences." "One client has gained a lot of confidence and is now able to socialise independently. Another is beginning to go to meetings and events with some support."
Gaining confidence	"Gaining confidence to go out to cafes. Gaining awareness of process of social and conversational interaction." "She now has the confidence to resume volunteering in a charity shop."
Enjoyment of life	"Some fun and good company."

A link to the outside world	“Having someone to talk to, at least two [clients] are housebound so, hopefully, I bring a bit of ‘outside’ in for them.”
Improving mental health	“Someone to confide in and share worries.” “Improved mental wellbeing; reduction in client depression.”
Improving physical health	“Improved health, reduction in hospital admissions for the client. Client much more proactive in maintaining his health on an even keel.”
Making friends	“Two people became my community friends. One a friend for life.” “We have become friends. She has a window into my family's life and really enjoys regular updates. She has met my husband. It keeps her in touch with different age groups.”
Support outside the family	“The client can offload any worries/concerns which he would feel restricted to do with existing family member, who also is in poor health.” “Having someone to talk to outside of her family has helped a lot.”

What has helped change for clients?

Volunteers were asked what they thought it was about Community Champions support or other external factors that had made a difference for clients.

The one-to-one nature of support	“Face to face meetings with one person which enables a relationship to develop.” “Individual ICT support.”
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The regularity of contact

“Regular twice weekly conversations where we can talk openly about anything and everything. Conversations which in the main, bring bright, positive and humorous chats.”

“The state of care and the difficulties securing reliable carers has perhaps increased the importance of Community Champions. A regular visit each week from someone independent, who they can talk to about the issues of life and share their concerns is I believe really useful to their well-being.”

“Having a time to sit and talk together. Keeping to an agreed time slot to meet which is coordinated by VASL.”

“Regular zoom contact with other clients.”

Having things in common

“We both have history of areas where we have lived or worked and also know families and friends with links to us both.”

“The fact that we used to work for the same employer has helped my client feel we have something in common and we enjoy reminiscing about our work experiences.”

Sociability and being able to talk about various things

“Chatting about interests has helped both of us.”

“Just being generally sociable and friendly and being able to converse on a number of topics.”

Transport

“Transport to gatherings has been essential.”

Gatherings and a range of other activities

“The gatherings bring them the confidence to mix and have changed their lives giving them a purpose.”

“Gatherings where they can meet other clients.”

	“Monthly meetings and lots of input. A reason to look forward from the team about what is available for us to join.”
Support from the Community Champions team	“Guidance from the Community Champions team has given me the confidence to take steps further forward for others.”
Identifying the need for further support from elsewhere	“Advising VASL of a situation for which Community Champions were able to get help from the local authority and carers.

What has hindered change?

Volunteers were asked what they thought had hindered changes for clients.

- Seven out of twenty-three responses mentioned health issues.
 - “My client’s reduced mobility is a hindrance to what we can achieve but not insurmountable.”
 - “Ill health and a lack of mobility have hindered us meeting on more occasions. It has restricted her ability to get more involved in other events. This is compounded by her struggle to manage online activities.”

Other issues mentioned by one or two respondents were:

- Covid isolation with it still being a risk for some people to go out and socialise.
- Clients’ ability to learn.
- Lack of contact with family members.
- Accommodation not suitable to care needs.
- Lack of transport to activities outside Community Champions.
- Feeling guilty about asking for help.
- Care responsibilities.

Changes for volunteers as a result of being involved with Community Champions

Volunteer skills

Volunteers were asked what skills and knowledge they had gained as a result of being involved with Community Champions. Answers were varied and similar to last year.

"I have gained a lot of knowledge with listening and chatting to clients. I have more confidence now when talking with people than I had before and finding they are actually listening to me and discussing various things with me."

"I am able to arrange outings and get togethers myself. That my opinion matters. That I am really very lucky to be part of the VASL team and I can make a difference."

"Listening skills, health and wellbeing, mixing with new people. Many other skills that I had thought were gone."



Better at listening and understanding people	        
Better at communicating with people about their lives	     
More knowledgeable about health and wellbeing	     
Improved social skills	   
Improved confidence and valuing self	   
Improved ICT skills	  
Working as part of a team	  
Organising activities and time management	 
Increased patience and tolerance	 
Knowledge about challenges facing older people	
Able to work across different age groups	
More empathetic	
Dealing with bereavement and grief	
Use skills I already have	

What else has changed for volunteers?

Satisfaction, purpose and meaning, and feeling useful

“I gained great satisfaction in helping someone.”

“A sense of worth and purpose.”

“Increased sense of value and self-worth, knowing that I've made some difference to a client's health and wellbeing by providing friendship and an additional sounding board and links to the outside local community, which my client is unable to take part in.”

**Improve
quality of life
or wellbeing**

“Given me a new quality of life by volunteering as it works both ways.”

“My mind has grown. My health has improved. I had been really lost after retiring due to poor health at age 73. VASL gave me back my life. Gave me confidence to start new ways to be useful and to be part of the community.”

**Learning or
changes in
approach to
wider life**

“I have learnt to slow down myself and be more cautious in my responses.”

“The skills and knowledge I have gained really help in my personal life, dealing with elderly relatives, more confidence to know what to do in a given circumstance.”

**Meeting
people from
different
backgrounds**

“I have met and spoken to a wide range of people of different ages and listened to different outlooks on life.”

**More
involvement
in the
community**

“I feel more involved in the local community having moved into the area at the start of the pandemic.”

“Commitment and a sense of responsibility for others.”

“I am more likely to join other groups such as U3A. Today curling, Friday singing. Encourages me to make more friendships. I feel positive, energised, confident.”

**Feel more
part of an
organisation**

“I feel part of a useful and worthwhile organisation.”

Friendship

“I have made a friend.”

The downside of volunteering

One volunteer mentioned the experience of loss,

“The downside of the coin is the loss of a good friend who I initially met through the project and remained good friends until he died. Fortunately with help from his family and myself, he was able to spend the last few weeks of his life at home where he died peacefully with members of his family around him.”

Community Champions undertakes learning activities and support to recognise that this can be a major part of the experience of ageing and being involved with Community Champions.

The best thing about Community Champions

Volunteers' answers to this question were similar to what has changed for them as volunteers.



The quotes below are a sample of what volunteers said.

“Having a purpose to speak to another person.”

“I feel I’m giving something back to my community. I think I make a difference to the quality of life for my clients.”

“The confidence and friendship that Community Champions have given me to step forward for others.”

“It has brought me into contact with people I probably would never have met.”

“The warmth, love and care. the learning, the friendships, the fun - Community Champions gave me back a purpose - a reason to look forward and not back as I retired.”

“Thank you Lottery for funding this amazing work in our community.”

Compliments for VASL and staff

Although this was not a specific question, many of the volunteers’ comments were focused on VASL as an organisation, or the support from staff, which deserves recognition in the project’s success.

“I could certainly get in touch if I had any suggestions, but it is a very well-run organisation with so many creative and dedicated people involved on top of their areas of expertise.”

“To sail a ship you need a good captain - to do what they do now - support, give confidence, inspire, promote and deliver a fabulous journey - Rohini, Jenny, Sam and Denise are amazing - wonderful - thank you Lottery for supporting us.”

“I’m impressed by the level of support and coordination which VASL offers. Thank you.”

“Thank you to VASL for being there and helping me feel I am doing something worthwhile.”

“I have been impressed with the organisation and support provided by VASL since joining last December.”

VASL and Community Champions do a brilliant job coordinating meetings and keeping in touch with clients.”

“The guidance that volunteers receive is exceptional.”

“The team are a very positive, kind group of people. They are so strong in their work ethic, striving to tackle loneliness issues and reconnect people with their community. Community Champions are a very open and approachable group for people that need them.”

6. Community Champions development

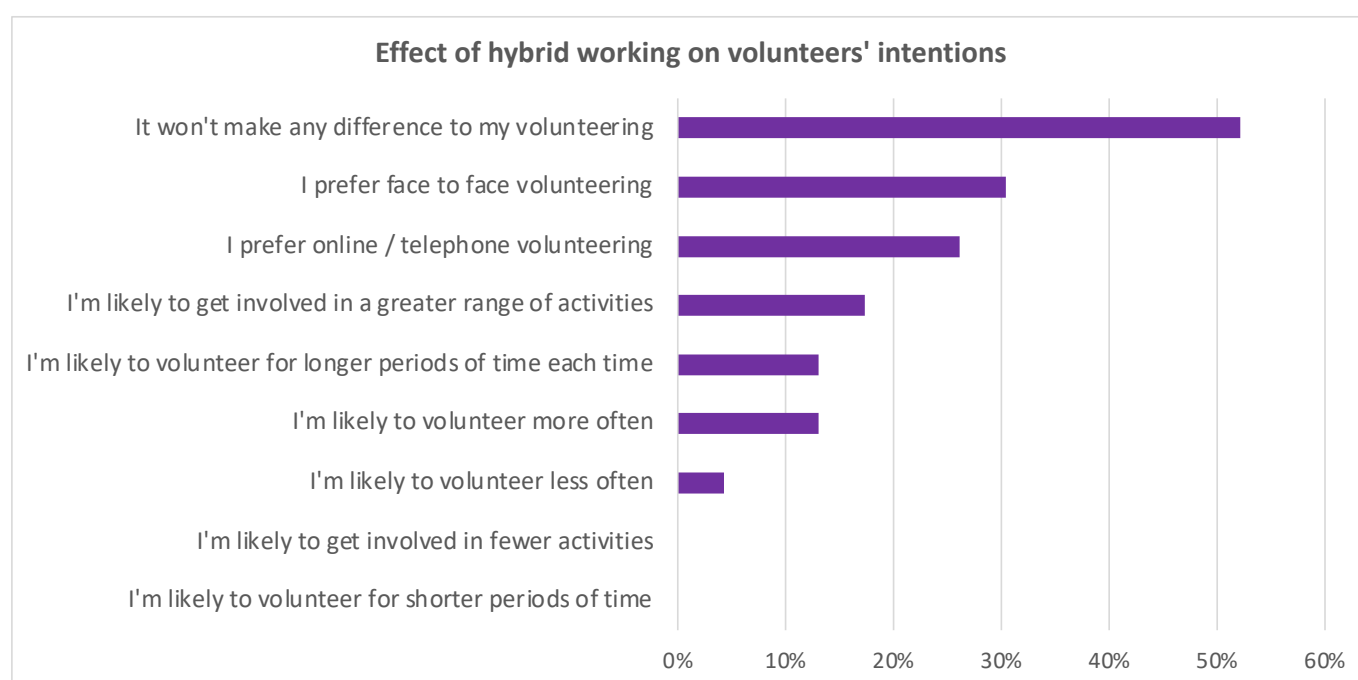
Specific questions were asked about hybrid working and recruiting volunteers, both of which are areas that Community Champions wants to develop.

Hybrid working and effect on volunteering

Community Champions has adopted a model of hybrid working, using both face-to-face and online delivery according to people's situations and needs. Volunteers were asked how this would be likely to affect their volunteering.

Over half of volunteers said that this would not have any effect on their volunteering, with those who said that it would answer positively that it was likely to increase their involvement. Only one person said they were likely to volunteer less often.

Preference for face-to-face versus online or telephone volunteering was reasonably balanced, with face-to-face only having a slight lead.



Making hybrid working work

In response to a question about volunteers' experience of hybrid working and any suggestions for improvement. Responses indicated that people had different opinions and needs, and interventions and activities needed to be tailored to the individual.

"I am not interested in hybrid [remote] working. I want to see people face to face. Whether that's in people homes or at community events."

“I find face to face most effective. Telephone contact as a backup is best alternative.”

“I only know about telephone befriending, but my clients tell me they look forward to having a chat and makes them feel less cut-off from other people. I think this works well especially with house-bound clients.”

“Gatherings are a great part of your volunteering, as is the face- to -face visits and now the digital help plus Zoom meetings bringing clients in touch with families.”

Other comments and suggestions about hybrid working included,

- People might avoid online contact but be less likely to forget face-to-face activities.
- Arrange drop-in sessions or getting a few people together for a coffee and chat to allow people to meet more formally to start with as not everyone has the confidence to just chat with a “stranger”.
- Making Zoom calls from the clients’ home to another pair of client /volunteers with a view to possibly meeting up for coffee face to face if physically able.
- Face to face is important as phone signal can be poor or people do not have or want to develop ICT skills.

“Telephone / online work is great but is only possible if the client has the technical skills or the wish to improve their IT skills. Maybe combine weekly IT sessions with tea and cakes before or after the sessions.”

- VASL are good at taking into account disabilities including hearing and sight loss, but other community organisations can be less good at this.
- Work commitments or health conditions can limit volunteers’ availability and capacity.

“I have limited time and phone works best as it can be difficult to reach my client. Setting up a given time beforehand isn't an option. I just keep trying to make contact.”

- Matching volunteers and clients to live more closely to each other is important for face-to-face befriending, one volunteer with a community friend said that there was a 40-minute drive between them.

Recruiting more volunteers

Suggestions that volunteers had for recruiting more volunteers:

Promoting Community Champions

- Meet with and talks to U3A, church groups, other local clubs and groups.
- Word of mouth, discussion with people about what we do, ask existing volunteers to evangelise about VASL.
- Local radio and newspapers
- Facebook and similar platforms.
- A stand at local events.
- Target recently retired people or those who are planning retirement through organisations like U3A or employers if this is possible
- Distributing leaflets
- Posters in libraries, shops and cafes.
- School assemblies to sixth form students who would like to do volunteering for university applications, experience in the work place or Duke of Edinburgh.

Encouraging people to become volunteers once they are aware of Community Champions:

- Modelling; a new or potential volunteer shadowing an existing one.
- Make people aware of what a fabulous rewarding organisation Community Champions is and the good it does in the community.
- Getting the message across that it's only two hours a week and might fit around other commitments.
- Publicise the benefits to health and wellbeing of volunteering.
- Address concerns about people becoming too dependent on volunteers and how boundaries can be reinforced.
- Offer benefits to volunteers if possible, for example opening up leisure facilities and offering transport.

7. Future plans

The focus of Community Champions 2 will be on **helping clients to make more connections** with suitable local organisations, activities, and groups for older people, so they grow their local social networks and are less reliant on Community Champions. We see this as a way of empowering clients and making our work sustainable. Volunteer Guides can work with clients to develop their personalised action plan through the **Next Steps course**, and provide support for the next three months, for example accompanying clients to new groups until the client settles in.

For clients who are digitally competent we want to signpost them to digital communities they can join to meet like-minded people and share common hobbies and interests. The internet can open a world of connection opportunities 24/7.

We know that not all clients will be able to get out to join groups, either through limiting health conditions, or through choice. For these clients we will continue to offer our **Community Friends** model, so they still have regular social contact with a Community Friend, or another volunteer.

We are also keen to set up more **volunteer-led groups** like the weekly Breakfast Club and monthly zoom Book Club, although are aware that not all volunteers want this level of responsibility.

Our networking and partnership building with other organisations offering opportunities to older people will be a priority. This enables us to pass on accurate information about local connection opportunities to clients.

About VASL

Community Champions is part of VASL, a local charity providing services and support across Harborough District and Leicestershire.

VASL's mission is to improve and enrich the lives of people in our community by providing services as well as volunteer facilitated activities. Other services include Support for Carers, delivered across Leicestershire; the Car Scheme providing transport for older, disabled or rurally isolated people; Mental Wellbeing Befriending providing mental health support; and a new Dementia Guardians project.

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