

IMPACT REPORT

2025/26



Improving the quality of life
for people & communities

our impact

9381

total interventions
for people

3664

interventions for people
supported by ACE Activities

705

interventions for people using
our Benefits Advice service

3044

interventions for people
using our Community Clubs

120

people helped through
our Handyman Service

214

people used our
Volunteer Centre

442

successful financial
interventions for people
at the Foodbank Hubs

240

interventions were
provided for clients
at our Men's Shed

601

people helped by our
PowerUP! Digital project

351

people were helped
being discharged from
Whipps Cross Hospital

70

internal VAEF
volunteers

6586

voluntary hours
given to VAEF

Many family members receive respite whilst their loved ones benefit from VAEF services, either by attending an activity or by receiving help with benefits advice.

introduction

Voluntary Action Epping Forest has been working across the District for over 30 years.

Our mission is to promote, support and develop an effective, sustainable, visible voluntary and community sector within Epping Forest and neighbouring areas by:

- **Supporting individuals most in need in our local communities.**
- **Working with local groups to access support available to develop solutions, to enable them to maintain their community focussed activities and services.**
- **Enabling a wide range of opportunities for those keen to volunteer and contribute to the wellbeing of their neighbourhoods.**

An active community, that cares for those at risk of isolation or facing other crises and where local citizens can give their time

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“ Local citizens can give their time and effort to improve the lives of others ”

and effort to improve the lives of others, is more important than ever. VAEF will continue to seek ways to encourage this.

This report, which will be produced on a regular basis, will allow our Board and our funders and supporters to understand how we are meeting the various needs of our communities and ensure that we are making the most effective use of our resources.

Sometimes our work can go unnoticed, except by those who directly benefit. I hope that this will provide some idea of the importance of what we do and encourage more people to support us.

David Tetlow
Acting Chair

ACE Activities

ACE Activities is a community-based programme supporting adults aged 18+ with learning disabilities, autism, mental health needs and anxiety disorders. As an approved Essex County Council provider, ACE delivers ASDAN-accredited programmes that promote independence, wellbeing, social inclusion and meaningful learning outcomes.

The service offers a wide range of structured activities tailored to individual goals, including arts and crafts, cookery, music, gardening, sport and upcycling. These activities develop practical skills, confidence, communication, employability and community participation, while reducing social isolation.

Based primarily at the Grange Farm Centre in Chigwell, with specialist partnership provision including woodworking and upcycling, ACE Activities provides person-centred support in a safe, inclusive environment. Participants build friendships, gain confidence and achieve personal goals, while families and carers benefit from valuable respite opportunities.



3664

interventions for
people provided
by ACE Activities

PARENT'S QUOTE

ACE Activities are a beacon of light and a shining example of a positive, happy, relaxed and supportive place/space for all no matter what their age or "uniqueness".

When I drop off my son, Robert, on a Monday morning to Grange Farm I am immediately encompassed in warmth and companionship and fun.

The manager never fails to impress me with her positiveness, energy, ideas and fundraising "drive" working so hard for the members to have opportunities to experience activities and interests that they wouldn't be able to in their everyday lives. The feeling of friendship is tangible between the members and the volunteers.

I was so "moved" when the manager surprised Robert with a birthday cake and everyone sang "happy birthday" to him. Remembering his birthday would mean so much to my Robert when he doesn't have a lot of people in his life who do remember his "special day". Viv, a volunteer, "captured the moment" and sent a picture through for Robert to keep and for his mum to see.

A big "thank you" to all the team of wonderful volunteers.

Names have been changed for anonymity.

Benefits Advice

The Benefits Advice service is available for those whose personal circumstances make it difficult for them to access services in their area or outside of their home.

A home visit can be arranged and information provided on benefits available to the individual along with assistance to complete application forms. The service is available to those who live in the Epping Forest district. Referrals are received from other agencies and health professionals.

£564,951

income generated from
successful benefit applications



705

interventions for people
provided by our Benefits Advice



CASE STUDY

Mr K was referred to the project by his housing warden as he was suffering financial hardship due to ill health. In the first instance we applied for Attendance Allowance. The application was successful with Mr K being awarded the higher rate. We also advised Mr K that he would be eligible for Pension Credit and we submitted an application which was successful and he was awarded £550 per month. The award of Pension Credit meant that he would be eligible for Housing Benefit which we went on to apply for and this was also successful. The benefit awards relieved some of the pressure and stress Mr K was suffering from which was having a negative effect on his failing health.

Community Clubs

Our Community Clubs, based in North Weald, Loughton, and Waltham Abbey, are dedicated to supporting people aged 65 and over by reducing social isolation and promoting wellbeing through friendship, fun, and community engagement.

We provide welcoming two-hour sessions where members can relax, socialise, and take part in a variety of enjoyable activities designed to support both mental and physical wellbeing.

Each session includes refreshments and entertainment such as singers, live bands, games, gentle exercise, and bingo sessions which help stimulate the mind and encourage participation. Occasional lunches and other activities also take place for clients to enjoy.

The clubs are supported by a dedicated team of three staff members alongside a wonderful group of volunteers who generously give their time and support. Without the commitment, kindness, and enthusiasm of our valued volunteers, the charity would not be able to provide such successful and meaningful groups for our local older community.

3044

interventions for people
using our Community Clubs



CASE STUDY

St. George's Day Community Event

We recently partnered with Darren from Essex Event Hire for a wonderful St. George's Day celebration. Darren kindly gifted a few complimentary tickets and along with raffle donations. This allowed us to take our clients along to enjoy a traditional afternoon of pie and mash, live entertainment, and community spirit.

The event featured performances from a very talented singer, creating a lively and welcoming atmosphere throughout the day. Our clients thoroughly enjoyed themselves, joining in with the music and getting up to dance with other attendees.

A particular highlight was when our clients led the room in singing Sweet Caroline – our signature closing song at every club session. It was fantastic to see everyone coming together, sharing laughter, music, and connection.

214 people volunteered through our centre

Volunteer Centre Epping Forest

Volunteer Centre Epping Forest acts as a 'matchmaker' for people seeking volunteering opportunities and for charities and not-for-profit groups requiring volunteers.

The Co-ordinator matches the interests, skills and time of local people with the needs of groups in the district. We also encourage and support organisations to operate good practice in volunteer management. Training and one to one support is provided to assist with this. Residents can access the service via a weekly local hub in Epping, or by telephone or online.

The Volunteer Centre Epping Forest is also part of the Volunteer Centres Essex network. We work closely with our Essex colleagues towards achieving greater consistency and partnership working for the benefit of our local areas and the Volunteer Centre network as a whole.

62 organisations supported



CASE STUDY

When I moved to the Epping Forest district I wished to start volunteering again. Previously I had volunteered for a charity operating a suicide prevention help line. I gained great satisfaction from helping the charity knowing my volunteering was important and often preventing a crisis situation.

The Volunteer Centre Epping Forest helped me find the right volunteering opportunity in the District. I started at a local organisation and love what I am doing; helping clients with mental health difficulties at a weekly club relax, have fun and find friendship. The founder member of the charity has created something very special that makes so much difference to the people it supports.

Many thanks Volunteer Centre Epping Forest!

£183,901

income generated from
successful benefit applications

Foodbank Benefits Guidance

VAEF works in partnership with Epping Forest Foodbank to provide benefits guidance to individuals accessing the Foodbank services across the district. Our support is available during the week at all four Foodbank hubs located in Epping, Loughton, Debden and Waltham Abbey.

The Co-ordinator primarily supports working age adults, although the service is open to any Foodbank client in need of assistance. Clients are offered advice on welfare benefits, help with completing application forms, and support provided is aimed at maximising their household income. Where additional needs are identified, clients can also be referred or signposted to other specialist services covering areas such as debt, housing, immigration and mental health support.

Foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust network.

442

successful financial
interventions for
people at the
Foodbank Hubs



CASE STUDY

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the VAEF Foodbank Benefits Guidance service. Without the help and advice from this service I would have struggled to get through on many occasions, with the cost of living crisis. I was helped by Rosie Coffey to obtain energy vouchers and food vouchers which have taken so much pressure off me especially through the winter. Just recently I was helped by Rosie to complete my PIP assessment form. I was very anxious about returning the form and talking about my personal issues. Rosie was very professional as well as calm and understanding. I can't thank her enough for the time and hard work she put in on my behalf. It's good to know that there are kind, genuine people that are there when you need help. Thank you.

Community Handyman

The Community Handyman service supports homeowners in the district requiring a trustworthy, reliable and DBS checked handyman to complete odd jobs around the home.

Jobs that can be undertaken include cleaning patio areas to prevent falls, changing light bulbs, fitting grab rails and key safes, fixing cupboards and fitting together flat pack furniture. Work is charged at a very reasonable rate.

120 people were helped by our Community Handyman

CASE STUDY

"Just wanted to thank you very much for all of your hard work for Mom and me over the year on her home, it has been very much appreciated by me. The last job in particular, the partially fitted draft excluder has already made a huge difference to her hallway."

"Thank you Mark, for everything you have done. Expert skills, professional, very kind and extremely patient!! I think in life making a 'difference' is an achievement, and that is what you have done."

Men's Sheds

The VAEF Men's Shed held at the Waltham Abbey Museum provides a welcoming, supportive and practical community space where local men can connect, learn, share skills and improve wellbeing through friendship and purposeful activity.

On a weekly basis men come together, not only to work on practical projects, but also to support one another, reduce social isolation and build confidence and companionship. Participants also benefit from wellness walks and sessions which include talks and advice from other organisations.

Our Men's Shed project is built on the simple idea that conversation and connection happen naturally when people meet and engage shoulder to shoulder. We are proud to see the positive difference this project makes.

CASE STUDY

Support has been given to a client with both accessing an ADHD assessment and also with his mental health challenges. The client said that our member of staff has been the only person to really get him and understand his struggles.

240 interventions were provided for clients at our Men's Sheds



428

pieces of digital equipment were issued to people

PowerUP! Digital Project

VAEF have provided a digital inclusion and support service for Epping Forest residents, facing skills and personal access barriers to engaging fully with the online world.

Drop in Hubs were available in Epping, Loughton, Ongar and Waltham Abbey for people to call into for support with their Digital devices, along with home visits for those unable to visit. Free tech equipment was available via the project to those struggling financially.

The service, titled PowerUP! was funded from June 2025 until March 2026, for the third consecutive year.



601

people were helped by our PowerUp! Digital project



CASE STUDY

Home visits to referred residents, living with complex digital and occupational needs was a key strand of the PowerUP! digital support service. Residents like PB, who was referred to the service by her GP social prescriber. PB, a housebound resident living with Parkinson's was struggling to manipulate / manage small, touchscreen devices and remote controls. Following home visits from Nick and Ayesha, the service was able to prescribe PB a voice-activated tablet and speaker, allowing her to search websites and play music, at home, via voice command activation. The service also helped PB troubleshoot issues relating to email, online purchasing and booking hospital transport.

"Just being able to play my favourite music at home makes such a difference to me. Nick and Ayesha were so kind and helpful. I didn't know this kind of help was available". **PB**

525

estimated number of bed days saved



WECAN Hospital Discharge Service – Whipps Cross

As a partner in WECAN, VAEF led on the delivery of a hospital discharge service for patients living in Epping Forest district, leaving Whipps Cross Hospital.

The service seeks to shorten hospital staying time and reduce readmission risk, by assessing patient's environmental home conditions and occupational capacity; and staging non-clinical interventions to support patient pathway and independence.

The service places a focus on patients being discharged and returning home with greater care and support needs than before their hospital admission.

Support referrals are received from medical and clerical teams at Whipps Cross Hospital, as well as from patients directly, through engagement on the wards with VAEF / WECAN staff. The service has been re-commissioned in 2026-27.

351

people were helped being discharged

£262,500

Estimated cost savings to the NHS

CASE STUDY

KB was a patient who wished to return home after an operation, rather than continue his rehabilitation as an inpatient. WECAN were able to make home furniture adaptations to help the patient create a safe, home environment, to continue their recovery. Installing a keysafe for carer access, arranging hot meal deliveries, providing an emergency alarm pendant and making weekly wellbeing calls all also mitigated risk once the patient returned home, potentially 21-28 days earlier than he otherwise would have.

"I am very grateful to Nick and Ayesha for all their help in getting me home and making my home environment safe and comfortable, and for regularly keeping in touch after I came home". **KB**



#Partnership
#Networking
#Lionsontheloose

PARTNERSHIPS

Seven Voluntary and Community Sector Forums were held in 25/26 on the following themes:

- Voluntary and Community Engagement
- Meet the Funder
- Digital - Get on-line
- Winter Forum
- Good Practice in Volunteering
- Share Gift
- Voluntary and Community Sector Partnerships meeting

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THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR FUNDERS LISTED BELOW:

- Big Lottery
- Charles S French Charitable Trust
- Essex County Council
- Epping Forest District Council
- Epping Forest Foodbank
- Essex Community Foundation
- Fowler Smith & Jones
- Grange Farm Trust
- Haslers
- Joseph & Lillian Sully Foundation
- Loughton Town Council
- Mulberry Trust
- Ongar Town Council
- Postcode Lottery
- Qualis Property Solutions
- Waltham Abbey Town Council

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