

Action for Carers Surrey

Taking community-based support to carers – the development of Carer Hubs

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About our Carer Hubs

This year, at speed, we set up new Carers Hubs at locations across Surrey

- The basic need had been identified as part of Surrey's new *Carers' Strategy*. We expanded on this to better meet the needs of Surrey's carers, and its broad geography.
- We were also aware of carers' lives, and the need to have 'drop in' rather than formal venues making it easier for them to access our support.
- Hubs also gave us the opportunity to reach new carers by being 'on the ground' in new locations.
- There was also a post-COVID factor – carers had been particularly isolated, and this face-to-face, regular, and welcoming approach provided a key social/emotional aspect to improve wellbeing.
- Finally, we know many carers, remain offline (or not online regularly). Face to face, local venues gave us the opportunity to reach these groups and provide services directly into the heart of local communities.

What our Hubs offer

- We have 13 Hubs operating in community venues across Surrey, allowing unpaid carers to drop in for advice, information and support
- Surrey has a challenging geography; a large county with a populous north half and a rural, sparsely populated south. Transport is an issue. We have 5 weekly Hubs operating, but also run another 8 'satellite' Hubs, twice a month in different locations to ensure as good a reach as possible.
- Crucially we are making the most of the venues, also operating wellbeing, information and training events there, as well as our support groups. Though we continue to offer sessions online too, to accommodate those who can't leave home.
- As well as supporting carers ourselves, the Hub model has allowed us to increase local partnership working. E.g. Council CPAs attend many Hubs, and we have regular events with other charities – bringing specific expertise directly to carers.

Outcomes for carers

- **NUMBERS:** Over a year we will run approximately 450 Hub days. If we average 10 carers at each, that's over 4,500 people benefitting from the Hubs annually.
- Carers have immediate access to talk to someone, getting emotional support as well as information & advice.
- Carers get direct referral/access to key services, such as food banks or CAB, and immediate access to Carer Practice Advisors.
- Carers receive additional information/support from partners we've invited to runs sessions at the Hubs with us.
- Carers have improved wellbeing from the support above, but also from taking part in activities at the Hub (such as information events or support groups), plus the social benefits of being with our staff, volunteers and carers, just chatting and enjoying a cup of tea in a safe but social space.
- We've reached new carers by being in the community, in places where we can reach new audiences, and by being drop-in, removing many barriers. These are carers we would not necessarily have reached with previous ways of working.



Action for Carers Surrey HUB

Carers' Hub Addlestone

Carers' Hub Guildford



Outcomes for Action for Carers

- We have increased and broadened our reach, supporting existing carers and contacting many new ones who we may not have reached otherwise.
- We're doing more partnership working, including more regular activities, e.g. with CPAs, and other charities, such as the National Autistic Society.
- We've increased our profile, both in the various local communities, and the Hubs overall are also an important new strand in our marketing activities.
- We've cut costs, because we now hold many of our face-to-face activities in these single Hub venues, rather than having to hire multiple venues for different events.
- We needed volunteers to help run our Hubs to complement our paid staff and ensure safe working, so began (from near scratch) a formal volunteer recruitment and management programme, focusing initially on Hub volunteers, though it is growing to encompass volunteers for other activities. The Hubs have really helped us reach this new audience of potential volunteers, many of whom are former carers looking to give back and develop their skills.

Challenges/Learning

Challenges

- We had to set up the Hubs at great speed – choosing areas, deciding on amount/frequency of Hubs, sourcing accessible venues, etc.
- We also had to do this while also managing a restructure and significantly reduced staffing due to funding cutbacks.
- Developing the volunteer base from near scratch was a challenge.
- We had to find disabled friendly venues, that met the needs of Surrey's geography, and were also used by other community groups to increase opportunities for partnership working.

Learning

- We would arrange to have more time! Although we did open on schedule, to plan, with all the Hubs, it was tight.
- Currently we are reviewing some of the locations to make sure they are absolutely right, and we may change a couple.

Timeline

- We started planning the Hubs and scoping venues as soon as we knew we had the contract, in March 2022.
- We then had to get the first Hubs up and running by 1st May.
- The remaining Hubs were all open by Carers Week in June 2022.
- The project is on-going, and we will continue to run Hubs for the foreseeable future.
- We have responded to carer feedback about accessibility and are opening a new hub in Banstead in January 2023.

Appendix

More about our Hubs:

- <https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/how-we-help/carer-drop-ins-for-support/>
- <https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/events/>
- For more information, contact me at Rachel.Brennan@actionforcarers.org.uk