Staffordshire County Council

Supportive Communities Annual Report

2024 to 2025

supportive Communities

Help and support is closer than you think

Contents

Foreword

Last year the Supportive Communities Board published its first progress report outlining achievements between 2020 to 2024.

This year we are delighted to present the 2024/25 Supportive Communities Annual Report that showcases how we provide the right support for people so they can live in good health and independently for longer, with help from their family, friends and communities.

As Chair and Vice-Chair of the Supportive Communities Board, we are dedicated to getting this right working collectively as partners to create the right conditions for change, working with communities, to tailor what we do to work best in each place. Our partnership priorities aim to support independent living, strengthen community capabilities locally, and boost workforce skills and confidence. In 2024/2025 we:

- Successfully embedded the Supportive Communities Programme across wider partnerships

- Received positive recognition from the Care Quality Commission about achievements to date

- Engaged with communities, partners and staff to review the programme and improve outcomes

Claire McIver
Assistant Director Public Health and Prevention, Staffordshire County Council

Supportive Communities Board - Chair

Lynn Millar
Portfolio Director - Improving Population Health, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board

Supportive Communities Board - Vice-Chair

- Strengthened local community capabilities and began a phased Supportive Communities locality approach

- Boosted workforce skills and confidence

We would like to offer a huge thank you to the Supportive Communities Programme Team, Supportive Communities Board, partners, community organisations and volunteers who helped make this Programme a success in 2024/25. Through these combined efforts, we are well positioned to create a supportive network that empowers individuals to live independently and with confidence.

We look forward to working collectively to continue to deliver the aspirations of the partnership in 2025-2026.

A partnership vision for the Supportive Communities programme

People can live independently with support from families and communities

Priority 1

Develop tools for promoting independent living

Priority 2

Grow and enhance community capacity for residents to help themselves and others

Priority 3

Help to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of the wider care and community workforce

Priority 4

Effective communication and engagement with both communities and the workforce

What we have achieved in 2024/25

Priority | 1
Tools for promoting independent living

Tools for promoting independent living

We have a range of tools used by communities and staff to find resources, community groups, and organisations that support independent living.

These remain popular and continue to promote self-help and independence.

Staffordshire County Council Health and Care Webpages

received around 54,700 visits in 2024/25.

Staffordshire Connects

more than 10,000 visitors accessed our online directory to connect with the 6,000 community organisations and services listed.

Happy at Home Webpage

A visual tool demonstrating assistive technology gadgets that support independence in the home. There were around 17,000 visits to the site last year from over 5,500 regular users.

The Benefit Checker Tool

has helped over 2,900 people access additional benefits.

50 Assistive Technology Champions

trained staff in each Social Work Team are ambassadors promoting independent living tools using the Box of Trix.

Over **4,500** visits per month to Adult Social Care self-help webpages

6,000 community groups on Staffordshire Connects with around **850** visits per month

80%

80% of requests for Adult Social Care are supported with information, advice, guidance and community support
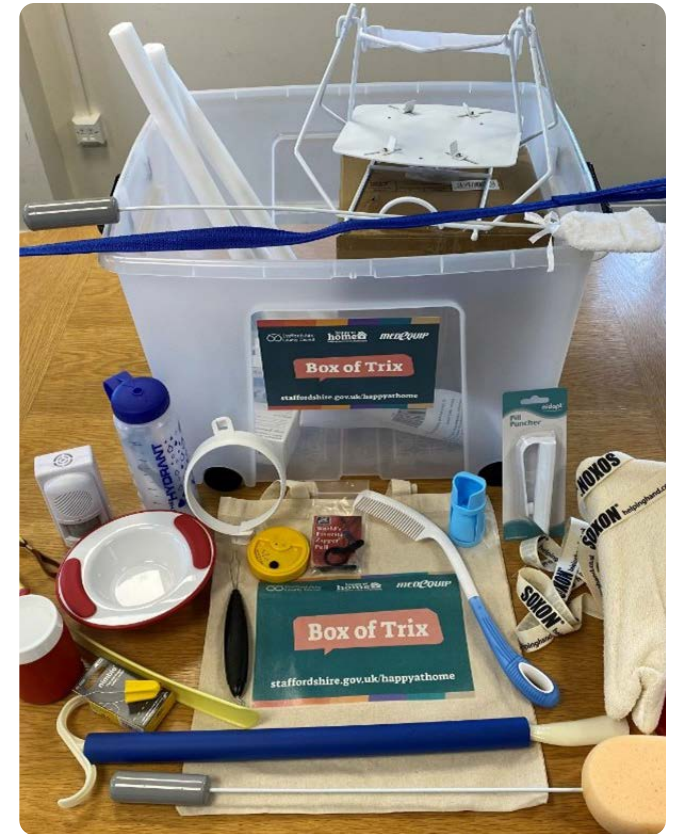
Real Life Impact
Assistive Technology Champions

Mrs Smith found care visits stressful and restrictive. After raising her concerns with her Social Worker, together they found a solution. They cancelled her care package (approximately £45 per day) and purchased simple aids such as a sponge on a stick and a lotion applicator at a cost of just under £7. Besides the financial saving this meant Mrs Smith and her husband had more time to get out and about significantly improving her wellbeing and independence.

Source: Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Cannock Discharge to Assess Team

Real Life Impact
Box of Trix

Mr White has tested out the Box of Trix assistive aids for a week and was amazed by the grabber tool. The little magnet on the bottom is great to pick up keys when he drops them, and the dressing stick helps him put on his trousers.

Source: Social Work Assessor, Tamworth Initial Response Team

Priority | 2
Grow and enhance community capacity for people to help themselves and others

Growing Community Capacity

Support Staffordshire is the key body working with statutory partners and communities to grow and develop voluntary, community and social enterprises and has 1,400 local organisations registered as members.

Support Staffordshire activities contribute to delivering the Supportive Communities programme's ambitions by:

- Support to 13 Social Enterprises. This included Senior Smiles, a new Day Care Service created to meet a gap following the closure of another provider

- Advice and guidance provided to 600 community groups (400 health and care organisations) sustaining groups such as the Newcastle Community Transport project though good governance and long-term planning

- Successfully placing 300 people in volunteer placements with local groups like Muddy Boots, a garden support and wellbeing project, Staffordshire Women's Aid and befriending with the Rob Robinson Foundation

- Securing over £5 million investment into local communities, for example:
  - Lifeworks Staffordshire provide social groups for clients and carers living with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They successfully received £25,000 from the Postcode Lottery for an outreach worker.
  - The Pathway Project received an additional £50,000 to support their work with adults and children experiencing domestic and sexual abuse.
  - The Alex Ferry Foundation gave Newcastle Foodbank £3,600 to purchase food and hygiene supplies to relieve poverty in the town

£5m
investment in community groups and organisation

25
community groups received **£210,000** Supportive Communities grant funding benefiting over **4,000** people

Over **370** referrals to **26** Community Help Points

83 Community Champions across three localities

Real Life Impact
The Community Church, Burton and District

The Community Church Burton, Stapenhill is highly active delivering local projects, including a Food Bank and youth sessions. The church's community involvement was boosted following Sharon Wright's input from Support Staffordshire:

Sharon has been an invaluable source of advice and support. She has shared comprehensive information on potential grants and funding opportunities. Sharon's warm and friendly manner puts people at ease and has played a key role in helping me build confidence in connecting with new individuals.

Anita Middleton,
Church Community
Development Manager

Video Case Study
Support Staffordshire

This video demonstrates the added value of working with the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise to deliver Supportive Communities:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uroJ7Sxbd1c

Community Help Points (CHPs)

Community Help Points are known and trusted places in local communities like Council Libraries and community centres:

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/ CommunityHelpPoints

They provide information and support for people on a range of areas, including: benefits advice, finance and form-filling, finding social activities, support and befriending, practical help around the home, non-digital support and digital skills and daily living equipment.
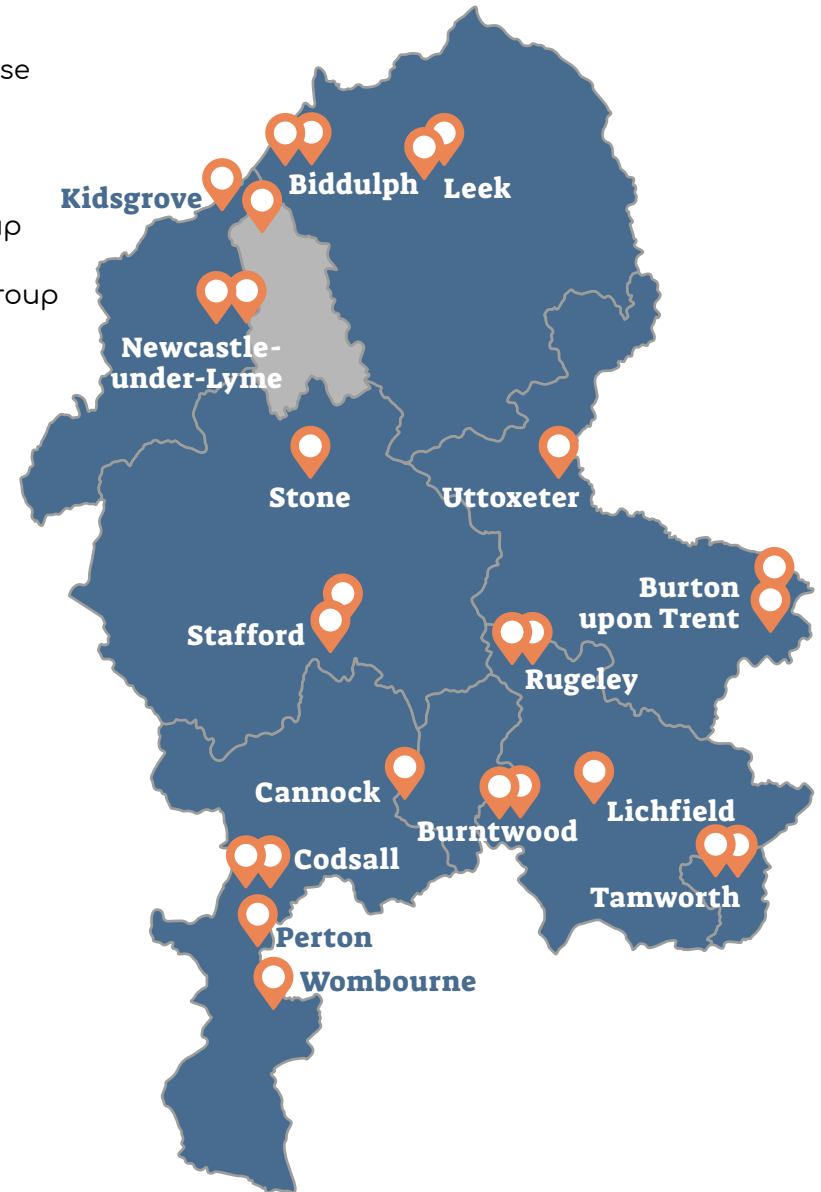
This year we listened to over 60 frontline staff who work in or refer to Community Help Points, and a sample of people supported by a Community Help Point to better understand impact. Thanks to this feedback the Community Help Point working group has:

• Established an electronic referral process providing an audit trail

• Improved data collection, evaluation and analysis

• Captured regular service user feedback and experience

• Started working with people with neurodiversity and autism to increase the accessibility of the Community Help Point offer

• Widened representation of the Community Help Point working group
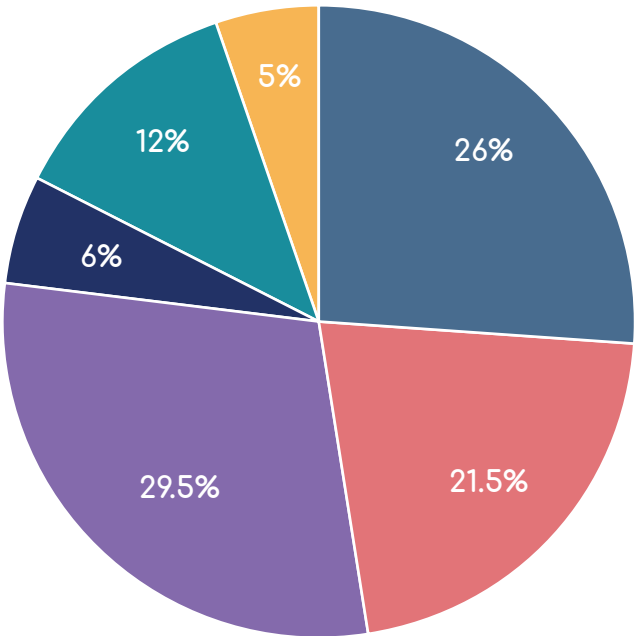
The Community Help Point working group has an action plan to deliver further improvements covering:

• Delivering bespoke training to Community Help Point staff on adult social care, neurodiversity and autism and managing difficult conversations

• Piloting 'walk in' access to Community Help Points

• Extending the Community Help Point network

Chart 1
Type of Community Help Point Referrals

Pie chart segments:
- 26% — Debt, finance and form filling services
- 21.5% — Befriending service, local and national
- 29.5% — Social groups and support groups
- 6% — Digital Skills
- 12% — Home help services such as gardening
- 5% — Daily living equipment and providers

Legend:
- Debt, finance and form filling services
- Befriending service, local and national
- Social groups and support groups
- Digital Skills
- Home help services such as gardening
- Daily living equipment and providers

Real Life Impact
Newcastle

Since his referral to the Newcastle Community Help Point, Mr Brown has joined 'Stone Alzheimer's Club and Approach Dementia support group' which he says has 'Given me great relief'.

Real Life Impact
South Staffordshire

Mrs White felt isolated and was referred to a South Staffordshire Community Help Point and signposted to a few local groups. Mrs White now attends two local groups on a weekly basis and feels more connected. The Community Help Point also provided information about a jigsaw library, a pastime she is interested in.

Community Champions

Community Champions exist in three out of eight localities. Before extending coverage across Staffordshire, we will hear from Community Champions about their experiences and ideas for the future.

View video for further information on the Champions initiative:

www.youtube.com/
watch?v=ebzH6ATVi0M&feature=youtu.be

Real Life Impact
Community Champions

A Burton Community Champion helped a man with dementia receive appropriate care after neighbours noticed his vulnerable state. The champion's actions ensured the man's needs were seen and supported.

> "Since becoming a champion, I've attended events, gained new knowledge and built my confidence. One skill I've developed is educating my community in ways that truly matter"
>
> Burton Community Champion

Volunteer Buddies: learning from the Pilot

A Volunteer Buddies pilot project, funded by Staffordshire County Council, started in November 2022 to test an approach to reducing loneliness and social isolation. The project, delivered by Support Staffordshire, provides temporary short-term support for adults to access local community activities and assets independently. This can include travel training, increasing people's confidence to access community activities, services, volunteering, training and employment opportunities.

The support is provided by local trained volunteers who work with individuals in a strengths-based way to understand their goals and gradually work towards them together. Over the last year, the Volunteer Buddies project has expanded into 5 areas covering Lichfield, Cannock, South Staffordshire, East Staffordshire and Stafford, with referrals from social prescribers, health practitioners and Social Workers.

The project has three different Buddy support roles covering:

Travel training

The project has created a bespoke travel training programme mainly supporting people with neurodiversity or learning disabilities. To increase the number of travel buddies the project has developed a train the trainers course.

Low level support

The new in-house buddy role has enabled people with low level support needs to be quickly connected into their community through 1,435 volunteer hours.

One to one support

More than 560 hours of in-depth volunteer support to over 40 clients.

This project is making a difference with buddy clients progressing into volunteering activities (50 hours) and one volunteer buddy has moved into a paid role.
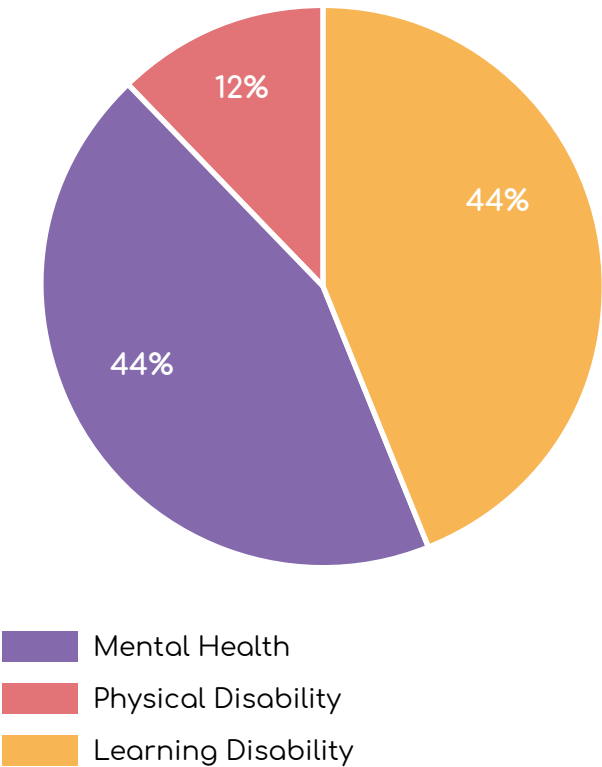
More than 560 hours of one-to-one support given to over **40 people**

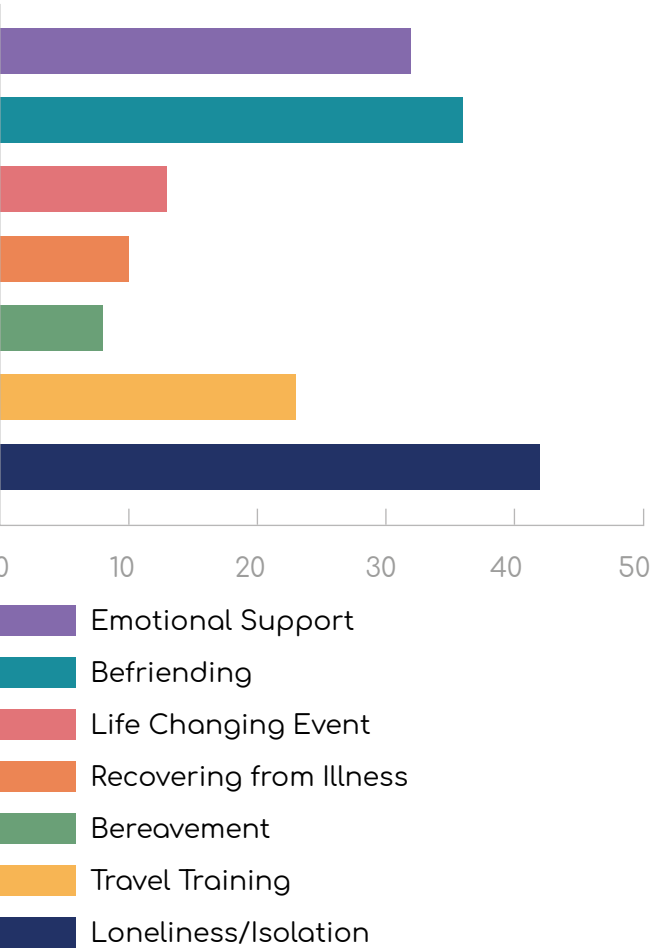**over 2,000 volunteer hours** delivered equivalent to **£30,000 paid time***

Chart 2
Percentage of clients referred by support need

- Mental Health — 44%
- Physical Disability — 12%
- Learning Disability — 44%

* This figure is based on the nationally recognised monetary value of volunteer time, which is equivalent to £14.43 per hour.

Graph 1
Reasons for support referrals
(41 people with 164 support needs)

Legend:
- Emotional Support
- Befriending
- Life Changing Event
- Recovering from Illness
- Bereavement
- Travel Training
- Loneliness/Isolation

Real Life Impact
Volunteer Buddies (1)

Jo* loves to bake, has severe social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder was introduced to a group in a community café. She now volunteers helping with the baking and is considering next steps towards a career in catering.

Real Life Impact
Volunteer Buddies (2)

Max* used to volunteer but since the Covid-19 pandemic become very isolated impacting on their mental health and that of their parent/carer. Max was supported by a buddy to join a community group and he now volunteers at the group.

*not real name

Community Grants

Over the year we worked with the Community Foundation Trust to award 25 grants to community groups and organisations totalling £210,000. An estimated 4,000 people have benefitted from a wide range of activities and support.

Funding was directed at bids that met gaps identified by frontline staff and partners covering the following themes:

- Form filling to access entitled benefits
- Food, education, warm spaces and social activities
- Community transport to access wellbeing support
- Befriending projects
- Healthy ageing activities
- Domestic and living skills development for people with learning difficulties

Real Life Impact
Community Grants

Barbara felt isolated after hip surgery and joined the Open House Friendship Café at the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Initially nervous, she quickly found the welcoming atmosphere comforting. The café helped her gain confidence and attend more activities, positively impacting her physical health and loneliness. She values the sense of community and support provided.

Stoke on Trent and North Staffordshire Theatre Trust Limited.

Project - New Vic 'Open House'

"I look forward to coming to Lunch Club every week, I miss it if I can't come, it's the only time I get to leave the house".

Methodist Housing Association (MHA) South Staffordshire Project - Support and Sustain

Supportive Communities Locality Approach

In 2023/24 feedback from frontline staff, Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise sector and other partners identified the variety of initiatives available to support residents and prevent escalation into services and the scope to do more.

Partners recognised the positive impact of the Supportive Communities programme and recommended taking a locality approach that was integrated and aligned with local initiatives. We used learning from the Citizens Inquiries, Staffordshire Moorlands Pilot and evidence from other areas of the country to make a case for a new approach.

Additional funding was identified to design a strategic framework to coordinate stakeholders, resources, and local intelligence to localise the Supportive Communities programme.

This year we have used data and insight to co-design this approach and introduced this new way of working into two localities. The locality approach is guided by several key principles:

Build on what works

Each locality has distinct strengths, networks, and resources. Identifying and building on these is essential for providing support systems that work for local people.

Respond to local intelligence and insight

Actions are informed by regular conversations, local insight and data collection, allowing a responsive approach that can evolve as local needs change.

Working Together

Success depends on co-operation with a range of partners from local government, health, voluntary organisations and the community to agree to work together, and share information to achieve the best outcomes for local people.

Identify gaps and take action

By understanding the demands and limitations of any current community support; partners can work together to design and deliver solutions to improve the support available, where needed.

Co-Production

Solutions are not imposed on the community, instead, they are co-produced with residents and partners, to ensure they are effective, appropriate and acceptable for the local community.

Diagram 1 shows the steps taken over the year to begin to harness the unique strengths of each place, identify local priorities, and build local capacity to address priorities and needs.

Diagram 1
Developing the Locality Approach

1 | Gather intelligence to understand local needs

2 | Engagement and co-design

3 | Getting partnership endorsement

4 | Use benchmark data to inform phased rollout

5 | Introduction of the approach

Real Life Impact
Networking Event

In 2024/25, we worked with partners and front-line staff to secure buy-in for the locality approach in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford.

This involved a number of engagement events, such as the Newcastle Networking Event in May 2024, which brought together the wider workforce across Newcastle.

200 professionals attended, which included: Social Workers, Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise sector, Primary Care Networks and the Local Authorities. This gave partners the opportunity to learn about each other and develop closer working relationships to build trust and confidence across sectors and teams.

Building on this success, there is now a demand for further networking events and opportunities as part of the locality approach implementation.

It was lovely to see the day so well attended and people to be very keen to share their knowledge. On my table, we all learned so much from each other and shared our knowledge about services we were not aware of. We need to consider how we bring everyone's knowledge together in order to share to the wider group.

Ruth Wright, Strategic and Service Delivery Lead for Stafford and Newcastle, Older People and Physical Disabilities Team

Supportive Communities Locality Approach

Diagram 2 shows the different organisations, activities, roles and ways of working that help to create Supportive Communities, where people have access to the right local support network (home, places, people and tools) to promote their independence and wellbeing.

VCSE access to funding

targeted local communication

VCSE infrastructure support

partnership working

insight and intelligence

local councils and partners

health and primary care

adult social care

community support

libraries

workforce development

engagement and co-production

volunteer buddies

independent living aids

community help points

informal communal activities

community champions

information advice and guidance

locality connectors and networks

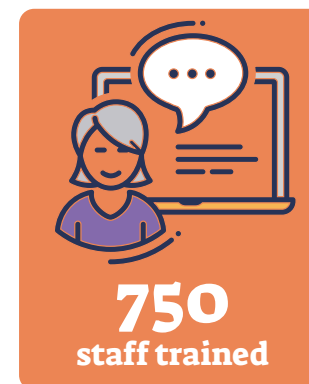my community and community network

Priority | 3
Develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of the wider care and community workforce

Supportive Communities training has continued to be popular, with over 750 people engaging. This is broken down to 243 attendances at the 'live' online and face-to-face sessions and 508 video views. Training is developed based on feedback from the adult social care workforce and the community and voluntary sector to meet knowledge and skills gaps. Working with Support Staffordshire, bespoke training modules have been designed and delivered covering:

• Strength-Based Conversations

• Working with the Voluntary Sector in Staffordshire

• Introduction to Daily Living Equipment and Technology

• Signposting and Resources

• Communication and Safeguarding

• Mental Health Awareness

• Signposting and Supporting Mental Health

This year, three new modules were developed for the 'Tools and Resources to Support Independent Living' training for adult social care staff to increase their knowledge around

daily living equipment and technology. For voluntary sector partners 'Introduction to Marketing' and 'Introduction to Social Media' training targeting supported community and voluntary groups to promote their groups and activities. A high percentage of attendees reported significant improvements from the training sessions with 97% of participants noting an increase in knowledge and understanding and 93% gained enhanced skills and confidence.
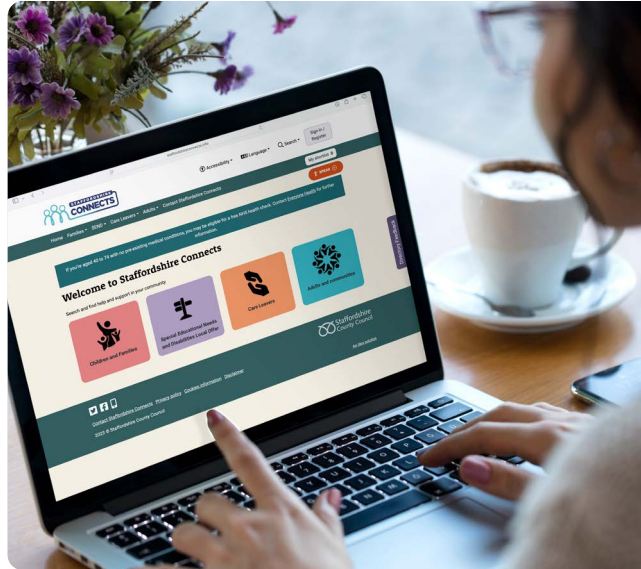
95% of participants improved

750 staff trained

Quotes from training course participants

Real Life Impact
Strength-Based Conversations Training

"The 'Strength-Based Conversations' training has helped social care practitioners adopt a strengths-based approach.

This has improved their ability to recognise and use the strengths of individuals and communities rather than looking to only address needs and gaps. The training has had a positive effect on Care Act assessments and daily conversations, evidenced by practice audits and a recognition from the recent CQC inspection."

(Tammy Drinkwater, Head of Provider Services, Adult Social Care)

Real Life Impact
Working with the Voluntary Sector Training

"I attended the 'Working with the Voluntary Sector in Newcastle' training session and learnt how to use tools like the Staffordshire Connects directory where I found a befriending service that I wasn't aware of before.

I was really pleased as I managed to signpost one of my clients to that befriending service later that week, which they found helpful. It's great to know about the different community services and support available locally, and I regularly recommend them to my clients."

(Kevin Brosnahan, Social Care Assessor, Adult Learning Disability North)

"I'll be sharing all this information with our support workers so they can help to enable our service users to access the community more"

"I learned about how to explore the various community services to support the service users"

"I was not aware that there was so much low-level tech available to everyone"

"This has been very informative and have learnt about the different aids to help people."

Priority | 4
Engage, listen and communicate with communities and staff to improve outcomes

Effective communication and engagement

Effective, two-way communication and engagement with key stakeholders has led the Supportive Communities programme to reflect the needs and priorities of our communities. Recognising that some households are digitally excluded, we produced 10,000 leaflets providing guidance on staying well over winter that were posted direct to targeted homes. A Fair Access deep dive was undertaken in East Staffordshire to understand people's awareness of and access to community care and support services for underrepresented communities.

Working with local representatives and a large number of community groups, Supportive Communities tools and resources were showcased using interactive sessions to improve awareness and accessibility of support for the community to help people remain independent at home.

Plans for 2025 onwards

What started as an internal Staffordshire County Council programme is now more inclusive with shared commitment from a variety of partners, with engagement at every level.

Supportive Communities continue to adapt and develop based on a continuous cycle of reviews, engagement and responding to feedback.

The Community Help Point and Community Champions reviews alongside new pieces of work such as the Fair Access deep dive have shaped actions for 2025 onwards.

Some key actions for 2025-2026 are:

- Building strong community networks by extending the Supportive Communities Locality Approach

- Deliver networking events throughout Staffordshire connecting the workforce to community assets and organisations

- Encourage small community-based business to deliver a range of individualised and personalised care and support for local residents

- Embed co-production starting with updating the council's Adult Social Care webpages

- Review and commission training and independent living tools and resources

- Extend and grow Community Help Points through localised communications

Governance

The delivery, performance and monitoring of the Plan is led by the Supportive Communities Partnership Board, consisting of representatives from Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Integrated Care Board, Midlands Partnership University Foundation NHS Trust, Support Staffordshire, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, District/Borough Councils and North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust.

The Board will bring the plan to life and make it the centre of what they do.

They are currently held accountable by the Council's Health and Care Senior Leadership Team and governance arrangements will be reviewed annually.

Partners

Staffordshire County Council

Support Staffordshire

Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT)

Staffordshire and Stoke Integrated Care Board

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

District and Borough Councils representation

Community Help Points

County-Managed Staffordshire Libraries

Aspire Housing and Services

Biddulph Town Council

Burton Albion Community Trust

Community Together CIC

Haregate Community Centre

Methodist Housing Association (MHA) Communities North Staffordshire

Methodist Housing Association (MHA) Communities South Staffordshire, Lichfield and District

Rising Brook Community Church

Rugeley Community Centre

South Staffordshire District Council

Providers Support

Support Staffordshire

Entitled To

Shaw Trust

Staffordshire Community Foundation

Health Literacy Matters

IDOX Software Ltd

Ruth Beck - Graphic Design

Community Champions

Burton Community Champions

Newcastle-under Lyme Community Champions

Tamworth Community Champions

Grants

Using our grant funding to provide projects in local communities:

Cannock Chase

Beam
Cherishers CIC
Kendall and Wall Charitable Trust
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) Communities - South Staffordshire
Project Indi
GRAIN Projects CIC

East Staffordshire

Trent and Dove Housing
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) - South Staffordshire
Project Indi

Lichfield

Kendall and Wall Charitable Trust
Inter Theatre CIC
Burntwood Be A Friend
Methodist Housing Association (MHA)- South Staffordshire
Project Indi

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Reaching CIC
Staffordshire Sight Loss Association
Project Indi
Citizens Advice Staffordshire North
and Stoke-on-Trent
Stoke-on Trent and North Staffordshire Theatre
Trust Limited
Aspire Housing
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) -
South Staffordshire
GRAIN Projects CIC

South Staffordshire

Perton Parish Council
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) -
South Staffordshire
Project Indi

Stafford

Stone Alzheimers Club
Beam
Cherishers CIC
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
Staffordshire Sight Loss Association
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) -
South Staffordshire
Project Indi

Staffordshire Moorlands

Reaching CIC
Borderline Voices
Citizen's Advice Staffordshire North
and Stoke-on-Trent
Biddulph Youth and Community Zone
Outside Arts
Creative Cheadle Staffs
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) -
South Staffordshire
Staffordshire Sight Loss Association
Project Indi
GRAIN Projects CIC

Tamworth

Changes Tamworth
Kendall and Wall Charitable Trust
Inter Theatre CIC
St Peters Community Church and Centre
Methodist Housing Association (MHA) -
South Staffordshire
Project Indi
GRAIN Projects CIC

*Please note some grant funded organisations
cover more than one District or Borough

Further information on organisations that
received grant funding can be found here:

www.staffordshireconnects.info/
kb5/staffordshire/directory/adult.
page?adultchannel=15

Contacts

For further information on
Supportive Communities
please contact:
publichealth@staffordshire.gov.uk

Website links for further information:
Staffordshire Connects
www.staffordshireconnects.info

Supportive Communities Training
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/
trainingandresources

**Independent Living Tools
and Resources**
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/happyathome

Community Help Points
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/
CommunityHelpPoints

Entitled To
https://staffordshire.entitledto.co.uk/
home/start

Support Staffordshire
www.supportstaffordshire.org.uk

Community Champions
https://letstalk.staffordshire.gov.uk/hub-
page/community-champions

Volunteer Buddies
https://supportstaffordshire.org.uk/
volunteer-buddy-service/