



STRONG COMMUNITIES

What makes a strong community?
Why is it important?

What are the challenges?
Where are the opportunities?

What makes a Strong Community?

Just over a year ago we launched Hertfordshire Matters, pledging our ongoing commitment to understanding the needs, challenges and opportunities in our county. The first report brought together some of the latest statistical data and feedback from our communities to provide a broad overview of life in the county. We've used it to help guide our grant making and inform our donors but we're also delighted to see that it has been useful for the voluntary and community groups we support, helping them identify and evidence the need for their projects.

Now it's time to welcome you to our first interim report. Just like the first report, they contain some statistical data and feedback from our communities but we've also taken the opportunity to go a bit further, bringing you interviews, asking questions and looking at what happens next.

This year's report is focused on Stronger Communities. As a theme, it was one of the most difficult for us to quantify but it was also one of the most important for us to understand. The strength of our communities affects all aspects of our life from our health and wellbeing to our local economy and environment. Whether based on geography or brought together by a shared cause they provide us with a sense of connection, an ability to influence (and be influenced) and a channel through which to contribute.

Strong communities possess the local knowledge, passion and perspective to create community cohesion and resilience as well as real and lasting change – but they also face challenges. The impact of austerity on individuals and families, the potential of inequalities (both real and perceived) to create division and leave people feeling disenfranchised, the continuing pressure on the public purse and the increasing demands on the voluntary sector.

But where there are challenges, there are always opportunities. While we need to acknowledge the needs in our communities, we also need to recognise and build on our strengths if we are to tackle them.

As a community foundation, it is our aim to encourage local philanthropy, the giving of time, resources or both, by local people to help support their local communities. Our activities are shaped by a strong belief that it is only by local people working together, making the most of our skills and assets and encouraging local leadership that will enable our communities to thrive.

We want to help foster the relationships between those with the resources and those with the ideas and aspirations. We want to see the voluntary, statutory and private sectors working together towards the common good. And we want those things because we believe that the future of our communities is not the responsibility of one person or sector – it lies with each and every one of us.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

What is it?

What makes a community work? What brings communities together? The most widely accepted theory which has stood the test of time is called a 'Sense of Community'¹. It has four factors which can be measured:

1. **Membership** – the feeling of belonging.
2. **Influence** – a sense of mattering. Working both ways, with members feeling like they have influence over the community and the community having influence over members. It works best with the idea of giving first before asking for anything.

'People who acknowledge that others' needs, values and opinions matter to them are often the most influential group members...'

3. **Fulfilment of needs** – by joining the community you get something in return for your participation. It could be a support network or skills – as in volunteering.
4. **Shared emotional connection** – shared history or experiences – including common causes and challenges.

"Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan)"¹.



How HCF is helping Supporting each other

Herts Young Carers were given a grant to continue their fortnightly sessions for Young Carers in Stevenage and North Herts. Having the opportunity to share their experiences, meet with others who are in the same position as them, and to get support to help them to cope with their feelings creates a supportive community that can help these young carers feel better about themselves and their futures.

How community groups improve people's lives

Research by CDF (Community Development Foundation) into the impact of small community groups was extensive and included the evaluation of the Grassroots Grants programme which HCF helped to deliver a few years ago².

The conclusion was that community groups improve people's lives because they are responsive to local needs, can work holistically, are trusted by their communities, maximise the local knowledge and connections at their fingertips, expert at what they do, committed and good value for money.

They evolve out of community needs and are led by local people serving those on their doorsteps, moving in to fill the gaps which others would struggle to reach.

'The research also showed that small grants are a catalyst for this social action, encouraging people to take the first steps to become active in their communities and sometimes inspiring them to grow their groups further.'

¹ McMillan, Chavis and Pretty Sense of Community Model 1986

² CDF 'Tailor Made': How community groups improve people's lives 2014

INTERVIEW



Fiona Plumridge

Fiona is a Housing Community Development Officer who works in Welwyn Hatfield district. As a child she helped out at the Canyon play area near her home in Stevenage and has continued volunteering in various roles ever since.

How do you think volunteering has changed since you were a child?

"Although there are lots of opportunities, I think it is harder now for people to take part. When I was young, mothers were more likely to be at home and be able to volunteer while their children were growing up and now there is more financial pressure and also people don't retire as early as they used to. In my work I find it harder to get long term regular volunteers during the day. More people are volunteering on shorter placements as a way into work. Also I think there is a decline in volunteering in areas where people commute and feel less of a sense of belonging where they live."

What do you think makes a strong community?

"A sense of belonging is important and I think working together on a common cause brings people together – like rallying against the Incinerator proposal in Hatfield. I have worked on a project to encourage people to vote who typically do not vote – which includes people in social housing and hostels as I think having a say in your community is really important. I have noticed that more people take part in community activities in some areas of my work patch than others and I think that reflects the fact that it is harder to be poor in an affluent area than it is to be poor in a poor area and some people hide away where they feel different.

I also think it helps in a community when services link up together to support people. We work with the CAB and Children's Centres and HAFLS and many other public and voluntary organisations to support our tenants. Where I live and grew up in Stevenage we have a strong sense of identity – the town was designed and built with small areas each with its own community centre and shops and everyone knows the name of their ward which I don't think is the case in other parts of the county. It feels like Stevenage

has more community centres than other places I have worked and I am sure that helps with a sense of community."

"It's harder to be poor in a more affluent area than it is to be poor where everyone else is poor"

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing communities today?

"Increasing shortage of housing especially social housing leading to more homelessness and more vulnerable people needing support. The new benefits cap is going to be a big challenge. We run training courses to help people into employment and digital drop-ins for people to help them understand their finances and affordable activities for children in the summer and we may need more of these. I think as well as economic support people need access to training and community networks."

What do you like most about your job?

"It can be that every day just one little thing you do changes life a lot for someone – for example encouraging a young person with very little confidence, at risk of eviction, to go on a course which led her into a job she really loves. Also some people need a lot of help and it needs time and patience to unravel their problem. I was able to help one person towards a Building Better Opportunities project (for those furthest from employment) which I had heard about from HCF Training and Development. I like working with the Residents' Associations and Panels and encouraging people to take part and to contribute. I think its important for volunteers to get something out of their commitment..."

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Our survey

We asked two questions

Q1 How can philanthropy support good people working in the community to make things even better?

Top three priority answers were



67%

training for staff and volunteers

60%

Helping disadvantaged people to help themselves



57%

Encouraging and supporting people to volunteer in their communities

Q2 What is the best way for philanthropy to help strengthen great organisations?

Top three priorities were



58%

making sure organisations are well managed and run

52%

funding core and project costs



48%

supporting organisations with similar interests to work together better



Our respondents were from a wide range of stakeholders – but all with interests in the community.



Recover team with their work in progress

How HCF is helping

Helping people to help themselves

We made a Comic Relief grant to Recover in the last year for their 'Road to Recovery' mentorship scheme where existing members who have been through the programme will mentor new people starting on their recovery journey who have been referred to the furniture upcycling project from hospital programmes. Ian Block, the General Manager for Recover said "Mentoring benefits both the new members and our existing members who have a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience to pass on."

How HCF is helping

Working together better

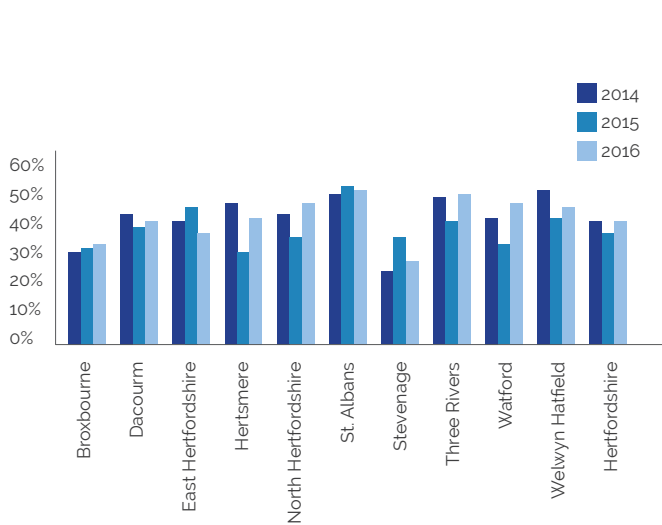
We gave a grant to help fund a CEO for the new Home-Start Hertfordshire to drive the merger across the county of six separate Home Starts so that they could get on track for the future in a climate of public spending reductions, and continue to deliver vital volunteer home visiting to vulnerable families.

COMMUNITY UPDATES

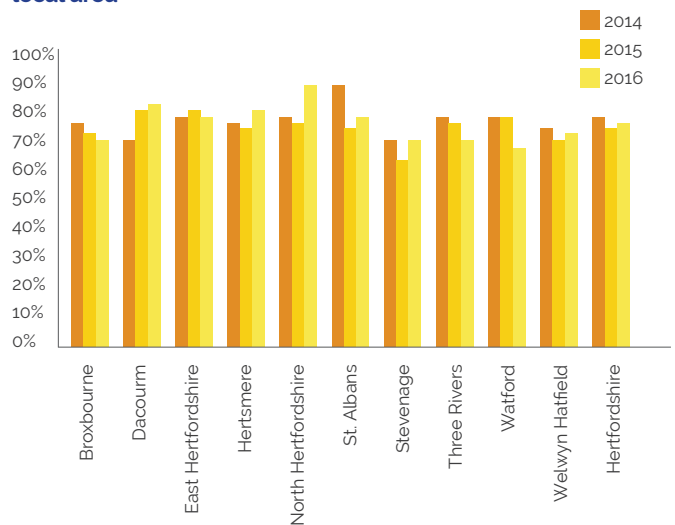
Volunteering and Community Cohesion

We've highlighted three updates from the annual Hertfordshire Residents survey¹ which show volunteering and community cohesion across the county in the last three years.

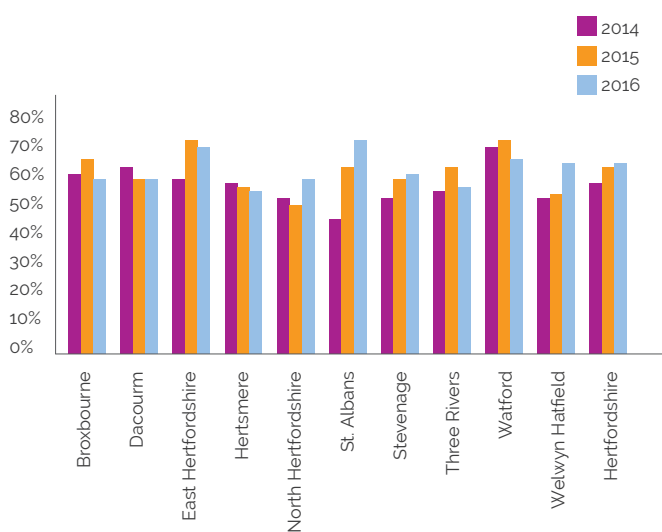
Residents who have taken part in volunteering in the last year



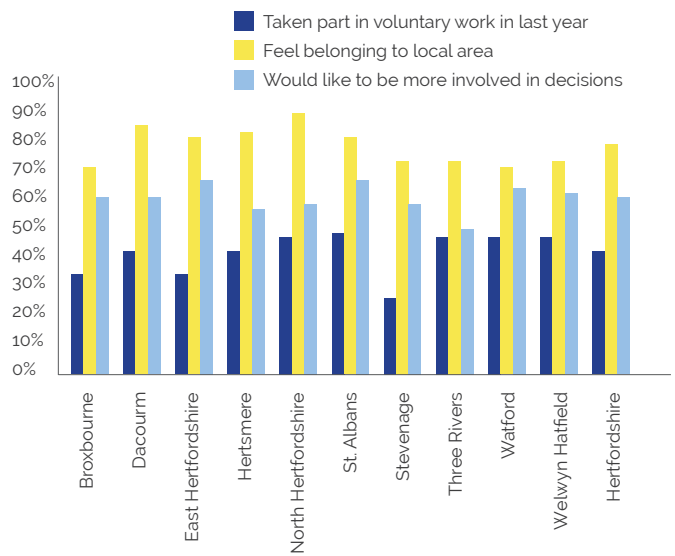
Residents who strongly agree that they belong to their local area



Residents who would like to be more involved in decision making in their local area



A summary of recent data 2016



¹ Opinion Research Services (ORS) commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW

Building Effectiveness programme

This programme grew out of our focus on developing stronger communities together with discussions with the High Sheriff, Will Hobhouse. His focus this year is on volunteering and on finding ways to bring additional business expertise into voluntary and community organisations. The aim of Building Effectiveness is to strengthen the organisations and make them more sustainable.

Ten organisations providing a range of community support have been selected to take part in the 2017-18 programme which was launched in December 2016. A key aspect of the project has been the creation and piloting of DevelApp – an online tool for organisations to assess their capability across eight business functions to inform their development plans.

Each organisation has been assigned an experienced business mentor to help them achieve their strategic goals. We are working with the Cranfield Trust and our own networks to provide this support. Progress will be evaluated in early 2018 and the organisations who have had the best development journeys will have the chance to win a BE Better Award at the High Sheriff's ceremony in March. The programme has been funded

initially for two years by the Garfield Weston Foundation and Will Hobhouse.

To find out more about the programme including the organisations selected to participate in 2017 visit www.hcftraining.org.uk



Staff and trustees at Home Start Watford & Three Rivers working on their plan

The Love Herts appeal – our community is Hertfordshire

Our Hertfordshire Matters project has helped us to identify areas of need and issues of concern in the county. We decided to launch the Love Herts appeal as an opportunity for people to come together to meet the most pressing needs in our communities, to 'Give where they live' in the community of Hertfordshire. This will enable us to make even more grants to groups whose work strengthens communities in the county. We will report back on Love Herts grants next year so we can track the difference we make.

To find out more and how you can be part of this go to our website www.hertscf.org.uk



WHAT NEXT?

As we look forward to the year ahead, we'll continue to work towards making life better for the residents of Hertfordshire. Here are just a few of the things we've got planned...

Encouraging Philanthropy

- The Love Herts appeal provides the opportunity for anyone and everyone to get involved in supporting fantastic voluntary groups in the county. A great example of communities coming together to help each other, we'd be really grateful for your support!

Training and Development

- Our Building Effectiveness programme will go to the next stage – watch out for our newsletters and check our website to hear how groups are doing.
- We're delighted to have secured continuing funding to deliver our Workforce Development programme, helping to build the capacity and skills in the voluntary sector.

Grant-making

- Our grant making will continue to be informed by the issues and priorities in the county, including those identified through Hertfordshire Matters e.g. among others, transport and accessibility to services was identified as a problem so we'll be looking at ways in which we might be able to tackle that.
- We're delighted to be managing two new grants programmes – one on behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner which is focused on activities which strengthen community safety and the other, a Youth

Social Action Fund which aims to engage young people in volunteering to benefit them and their communities now and in the future.

- We know how important grassroots groups are in contributing to strong communities and community cohesion so we'll be reviewing our grant programmes and processes with them in mind to ensure the funding is accessible, appropriate and reaching those who can benefit most.

How HCF is helping

Providing a local solution

To help to alleviate the burden on low income families in their neighbourhood, the Borehamwood Foodbank were given funding to run summer holiday family lunches. Many families whose children receive free school meals in term time, really struggle with the extra costs and pressures during the school holidays but once a week over the summer the Foodbank provided a healthy two course meal, bringing the families together in a supportive community setting.



Volunteers in the foodbank kitchen

FIND OUT MORE & STAY IN TOUCH

Hertfordshire Community Foundation

Grants and philanthropy

Sign up for our newsletters on our website to keep up to date with our grants programmes and philanthropy www.hertscf.org.uk and follow us on Facebook and twitter www.twitter.com/HertsCommunityF

HCF Training and Development

For details of our extensive training and development programmes for voluntary sector organisations and to sign up for HCF Training and Development newsletters go to www.hcftraining.org.uk

Hertfordshire Matters

Our Hertfordshire Matters reports published in 2016 remain relevant and have links to a wide range of data. Go to our website to find out more www.hertscf.org.uk/herts-matters/

Herts Insight

The HertsLIS website from which much of our data was sourced has been relaunched as Herts Insight and is worth following on Twitter if you want to be alerted to any new data about the residents of Hertfordshire.



website: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/insight

or follow on twitter: www.twitter.com/HertsInsight

Hertfordshire Community Foundation

Foundation House, 2-4 Forum Place, Fiddlebridge Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 0RN
Tel 01707 251351 www.hertscf.org.uk

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