

# Hastings Voluntary Action

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Age-friendly and  
inclusive volunteering  
grant programme  
evaluation

January 2021



In partnership with:

# About us

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## **Centre for Ageing Better**

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

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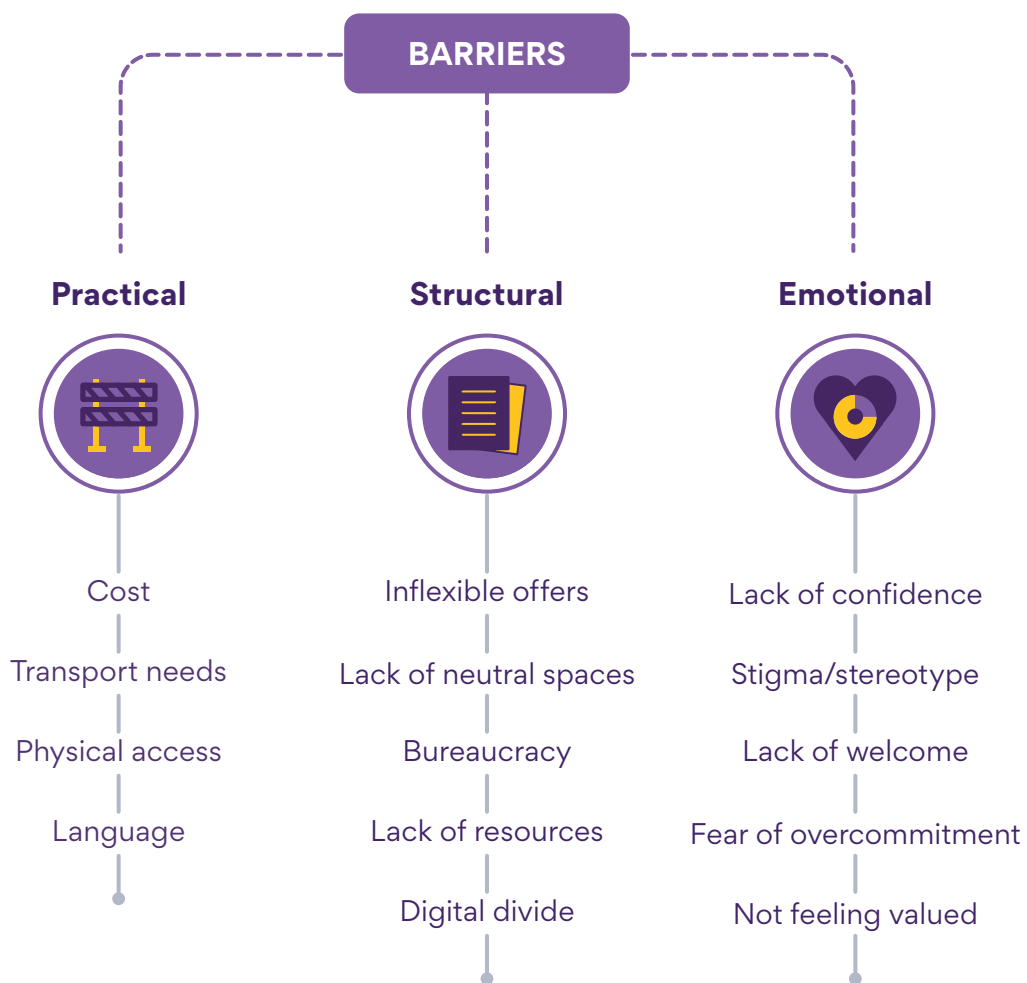
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# Introduction

The Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) undertook a review into community contributions in later life in October 2018. The review found that many older people, who would benefit most from contributing to their communities, encounter practical, structural and emotional barriers that prevent them from taking part, or from remaining involved as life changes. It called on voluntary organisations to do more to tackle these barriers and set out six key principles for achieving this.

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## Barriers to participation



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## Age-friendly, inclusive volunteering is:



Flexible and responsive



Valued and appreciated



Enabled and supported



Meaningful and purposeful



Sociable and connected



Makes good use of my strengths

### Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering grant programme

Following the review, the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering fund was set up to put these principles into practice. The programme grant-funded five projects to develop and document models of good practice in supporting older people's voluntary and community activity. The focus was on those most at risk of missing out on the benefits of contributing to their communities.

#### The fund has three priorities:

- Sustaining lifelong contributions and helping people remain involved throughout major life changes such as bereavement, caring or developing a health condition.
- Helping people connect to and take part in voluntary activities and opportunities that suit their life circumstances, including informal and self-organised contributions.
- Providing practical support to include older people who currently face barriers to volunteering (for example due to health, language, and cultural or social factors).

The project initially intended to only address the priority ‘Helping people connect to opportunities to suit their life circumstances’. However, in practice, it had some impact on all priorities.

Each project received approximately £50,000 to run over a one-year period between April 2019 and March 2020<sup>1</sup> The grant programme adopted a grant-plus model, supporting projects to maximise their learning and outcomes through project development, action-learning and evaluation support. The focus was as much on development, learning, sharing good practice and sustainability as on immediate outcomes and impact (the grant-plus model was funded through additional funding from the Centre for Ageing Better above the £50,000 for each project).

The scale and activities of the projects are different, each working with older people in different circumstances and settings and using different approaches. This provided opportunities to learn about, and measure the impact of, different models of tackling barriers to community contributions in later life and supporting older people’s voluntary and community activity.

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## Hastings Voluntary Action

Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) developed a project with three strands:

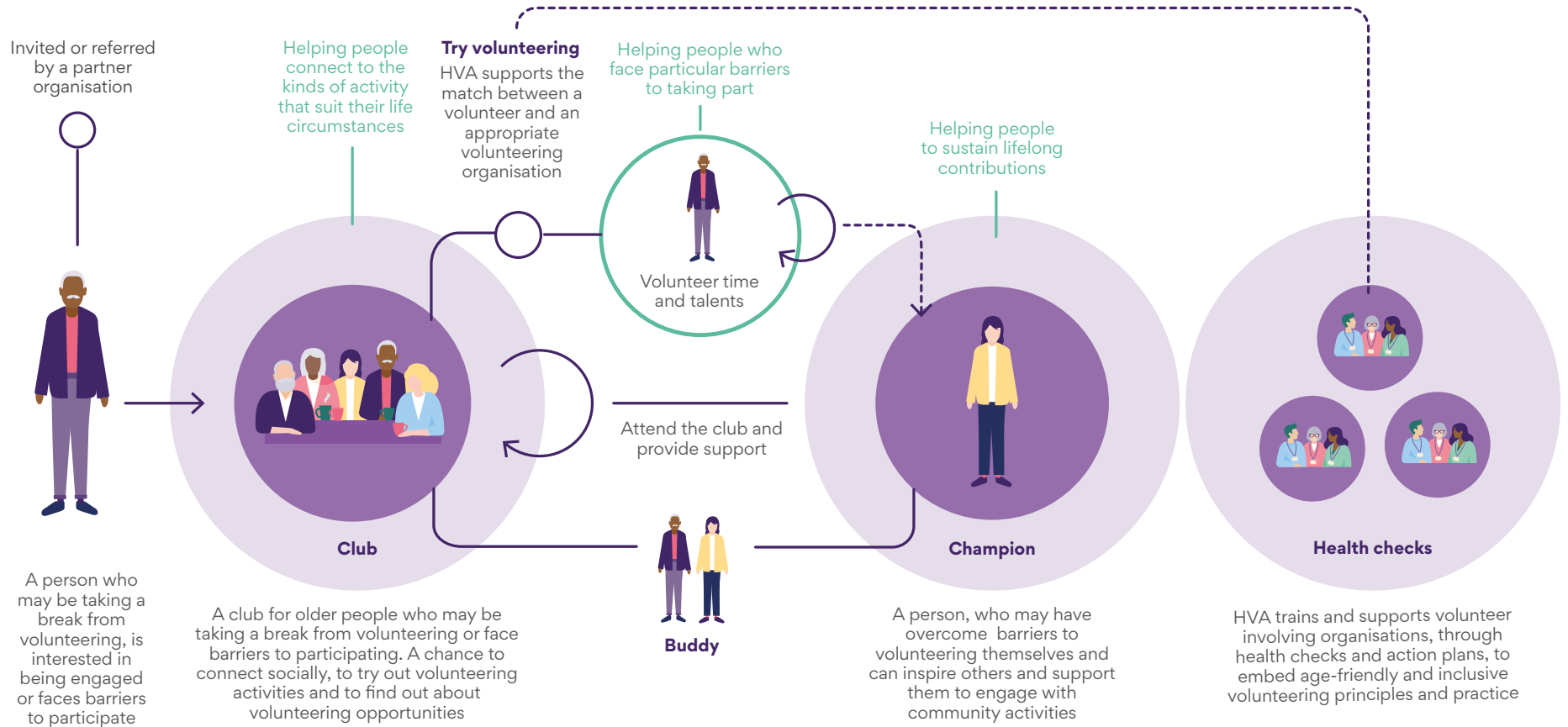
- A club, ‘Volunteering by the Sea’, for people that may be taking a break from volunteering or face barriers to participation. The club sought to promote volunteering opportunities and tackle such barriers. It supported people into suitable volunteering opportunities including micro and ad hoc volunteering, taster sessions and more formal or longer-term volunteering. These clubs were held monthly and included fun activities to help break the ice socially and promote social connections. Events offered micro-volunteering in-situ, such as making tea, putting out chairs, meeting and greeting attendees.
- Recruitment of ‘volunteer champions’, who are people that may have overcome or are still striving to fully overcome volunteering barriers and/ or are passionate about volunteering, to help inspire and support people into volunteering, as well as help design the model and steer the project.

‘Organisational Health checks’ promoted with local volunteer organisations to reduce barriers and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice, as well as potentially providing a source of volunteering opportunities for volunteer club members.

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<sup>1</sup> The end of the project and the evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted on completion of the project. Consequently, this delayed some evaluation activity and access to information, although most of the evaluation activity was conducted prior to the lockdown.

Introduction



## Learning and evaluation

A ‘light-touch’, independent, evaluation of the project has been conducted to capture learning and identify emerging impact. This is a one-year developmental programme and therefore the focus is more on evidence of good-practice models that can overcome practical barriers and embed the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, with only an expectation of emerging individual and organisational impact. The light touch evaluation and the length of time that the project ran makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether the project has led to working with volunteers from more diverse backgrounds than would have otherwise happened and/or whether the volunteering experience (despite being good) was better than it would have been otherwise. However, the findings do illustrate how practice has been adapted in line with the principles of age friendly and inclusive volunteering and began to explore a new approach that hopefully with more time would lead to a greater diversity of volunteers and a better volunteering experience.

### **Specifically, the evaluation sought to capture evidence about how the model has:**

- Helped meet the fund’s priorities.
- Overcome practical, structural and emotional barriers to community contributions and volunteering.
- Tested, validated and embedded the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles.
- Impacted on individuals and organisations involved in the project.

### **Monitoring and evaluation has been embedded in the programme and project from the outset. This includes the following activity, which has informed this report:**

- Quarterly monitoring reports and other documentary evidence provided by the projects to the Centre for Ageing Better.
- Co-creation of a Theory of Change working document to help shape the delivery of the project, establish expected outputs, outcomes and impacts, and provide a guide to evaluating the model (see appendix) (the Theory of Change was co-produced with the project at the development stage of the programme, and subsequently some elements may have evolved over time).
- Learning logs maintained by the project to capture learning, ongoing feedback, progress and impact.



- Development of evaluation materials to capture evaluation insight from individuals and organisations involved in the project.<sup>2</sup> This includes interviews with over 10 volunteer club members and volunteer champions, stakeholders involved in delivering the project and other stakeholders.

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<sup>2</sup> These materials were co-produced with the project and Centre for Ageing Better and are available for use in the continued monitoring and evaluation of the project and model. They were used by the evaluators towards the end of the project to independently capture learning and impacts through face-to-face, telephone and digital methods with individuals and key stakeholders involved in the project and programme.

# Learning and impact

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## What activities have taken place? Process, challenges and learning

The project received significant support through the grant-plus funding model.

**The project valued developmental and learning support, as well as opportunities to share good practice with other organisations and build relationships**, which appear to have led to positive outcomes for the project and HVA:

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“The biggest thing has been the learning element of it. The fact that we’ve learnt about prototyping, had the time to prototype and develop the project through test and learn. This has been really positive for the project and are techniques we’d like to share across HVA.” Stakeholder

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“I found some of the training in London really useful, such as the training on media and how to present your story, and some of the good examples, useful for this project and beyond that. There are various aspects we’ve learnt that we will continue to use in our organisation. Just the chance to step away for a few hours or days, slow down and reflect – this is not normally something we get a chance to do. We’re normally always rushing to deliver and don’t have the time to do this, which felt like a bit of a privilege.” Stakeholder

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“We really valued getting coaching and support around particular skills and approaches, which are useful in this project and beyond. It’s improved our capacity as an organisation. I was also attracted to interact and learn from other projects around the country, to get out of our own area. We’ve made connections to, and relationships with, the other projects. We’ve visited one of the neighbouring projects and learnt from some of the others. This helps with this project, but they’re also relationships that we hope will continue in the future.” Stakeholder

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Similarly, the project said it **appreciated the programme’s culture of test and learn, and the supportive approach** of the Centre for Ageing Better:

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“The programme has felt very supportive, the Centre for Ageing Better and the other projects and organisations providing support. You felt like you could test and learn and not be scared to fail. This is a real positive and a rare thing with funded projects.” Stakeholder

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However, the project suggested that it could have **benefited from more time to develop and establish all elements of the model**, allowing learning and impact to be fully realised:

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“We always knew this was a one-year project, so we’re not going to make too many excuses. However, one year goes very quickly. We felt under pressure to get things going, especially because it was only a year-long project and in hindsight we would have welcomed more time to develop the project before we started the first club. And similarly, we spent a lot of time designing the project and it would have been helpful to have more time to get it right and see the impact over a longer period of time. So ideally, it would have been an 18-month or two-year programme.” Stakeholder

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“Just as it felt like we were getting going and making progress, I could see the end quickly coming into sight and I started to feel like we wouldn’t have enough time to embed what we’re doing, really learn from it and understand its full impact. So more time would have been really valuable.” Stakeholder

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Related to the above, the project highlighted that **certain aspects of the model, primarily the nature of the club and the organisational health checks, require more time and development to get fully right:**

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“I think we’ve made progress on all elements of the project, but I think it’s fair to say that we haven’t quite nailed the approach to the volunteer club. It has always been a bit difficult to define. Getting that balance right between being social and volunteering. We’ve had people dip in and out of it or come once, which is fine, but originally I envisaged that it would be something that supports people over a period of time and that members would form a kind of support or friendship group, and go through a process or on a volunteering journey together. We’ve had some people come to all the clubs, but for most it hasn’t quite worked out like that. I think we’re learning to be flexible and less prescriptive and we are starting to get to a model that works, but it doesn’t feel like it is there quite yet.” Stakeholder

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“The health checks are a good idea and we’ve had some success promoting them, and there’s been real interest in the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles. But we’d have liked to do more to promote them and follow-up and work with organisations to really help them embed the principles, and then link volunteers to these organisations that have good age-friendly volunteering practice.” Stakeholder

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Consistent with other projects, **striking the right language and tone around volunteering was a challenge** for the project, which it tried to manage through a subtle approach to introducing volunteering:

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“We were never sure about how overt or not we should be that the club is about volunteering. We knew we didn’t want it to just be a social club and to pay for people to come and have a cup of tea and cake. We wanted to keep the end result in mind – that it is about helping people into volunteering. However, we also knew we didn’t want to scare people off. It often felt that volunteering was like a cat hiding under the table and we only brought it out slowly, when the time was right so that we didn’t scare people off. Saying that, we did settle on a name for the club, ‘Volunteering by the sea’, which should have made it clear to people what it was all about.” Stakeholder

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Building on the above points about time, definition and language, HVA said that **one of its biggest challenges was reaching people to participate in the club, in terms of numbers, suitability and sustaining their involvement in the club and going on to volunteer**. This it tried to resolve by promoting the club through its existing and partner networks, and holding the club in different community locations:

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“It was difficult to promote and market something, the volunteer club, that wasn’t fully formed. Did we promote it as a volunteering club or a social club? We used existing networks and organisations, and also social media and networks on social media. We weren’t able to hit as many people as we’d like, to reach people that are below the radar or not linked in with existing networks, which are perhaps the most important group. We probably need more time to get this right and gain momentum.” Stakeholder

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## How have barriers to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering been overcome?

The project **aimed to address age-friendly and inclusive volunteering barriers** through its model:

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“Our aim was to address the barriers to volunteering at all levels, including the individual and the organisational level. Individually through the club, by helping people to increase their confidence to volunteer through a fun, sociable and supportive and informative environment, and supporting people to try volunteering of different kinds to suit their circumstances. The volunteer champions were also part of this, hoping to inspire, encourage and support people to volunteer. Organisationally, the health checks aimed to get organisations to review their approaches, to reduce barriers and adopt age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles.” Stakeholder

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There are examples of where these barriers have been reduced and overcome. For example, **practical barriers** have been overcome through co-locating volunteer club sessions alongside other volunteering opportunities or in local community venues:

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“Hosting the club at Central Hall [a new venue hosting local voluntary organisations and a community cafe aimed at supporting older people] meant that we were promoting age-friendly and inclusive volunteering in an age-friendly environment, with some opportunities on the doorstep, including volunteering in the café itself, which helped reduce physical barriers to participating.” Stakeholder

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“We held satellite clubs in deprived local areas, away from the town centre and sought out local voluntary opportunities. For example, we held a club in Ore and all eight people signed up to volunteer in the relaunch of Ore Community Library, which had received a lot of positive attention in the area. This approach meant that we were bringing opportunities to people and not asking people to have to work too hard to seek out opportunities or attend a club.” Stakeholder

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**Structural barriers** have been overcome by making the volunteer club fun and sociable. Participation has been flexible, while offering volunteering opportunities to suit different circumstances, such as taster sessions, micro and ad hoc volunteering along with more formal or longer-term options:

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“We’ve tried to make the club fun and sociable, while not losing sight that it is about encouraging and supporting people to volunteer. We’ve tried to have a light touch volunteering approach. It’s not been a particularly formal process. We’ve never once asked people to fill in forms. We’ve tried to keep the club and the process very relaxed and informal. People can dip in when they like, when they’re available and have time around other commitments.” Stakeholder

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“The volunteering opportunities that have been offered are flexible, like making tea at the club, access to taster sessions, occasional volunteering or more formal or significant volunteering. Different things to suit different circumstances.” Stakeholder

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**Emotional barriers** have been overcome by providing activities to improve self-esteem, build social connections and increase confidence to volunteer, as well as providing a supportive environment, including through volunteer champions:

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“Within the club there are some people lacking confidence, self-esteem, with anxiety or mental health issues. Through our activities and support, we’ve helped them move forward and take steps into volunteering. This includes activities like quizzes to get people talking and build bonds, or themed clubs around well-being, meditation and mindfulness, or the support, encouragement and guidance of our volunteer champions and staff.” Stakeholder

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“I saw my role as a volunteer champion to help people take part, both practically and emotionally, supporting and talking to people, sharing my experience, getting them involved and helping build up their confidence and show them they can do it.” Volunteer Champion

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### **Reducing barriers and increasing access to volunteering opportunities**

The project said it had challenges attracting people that are perhaps ‘below the radar’. For example, individuals who may be currently unengaged with the community or voluntary sector in the area, but may still be interested in volunteering and would benefit from the opportunity that volunteering provides. However, the project demonstrated that it could reduce barriers to getting involved through informal, flexible and supportive approaches, and help people into new volunteering activities by promoting opportunities:

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“I’d never volunteered before coming to the club. I was interested in doing something new, different, meeting new people and developing my skills and experience. I was referred to the club. This is not normally my sort of thing, but they were friendly and welcoming to me, and said I could get involved as much or as little as I wanted, to suit me. By coming to the club I got introduced to different opportunities and I’m now volunteering for three different groups and doing different things to suit my interests and time. This wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for the club and the help of the staff and other people there.” Volunteer club member

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## How have age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles been promoted and embedded?

The project aimed to **embed and promote age-friendly and inclusive volunteering** through its model:

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“We designed much of what we did with the principles in mind. The volunteer club and volunteer champions are aimed at addressing barriers using the principles, while the health check with organisations specifically promotes the principles. It is designed in such a way that questions are asked of organisations about their practice against each of the six principles.” Stakeholder

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### **Flexible and responsive:**

The volunteer club model has evolved to become more flexible and responsive, and less prescriptive, by allowing members to participate on their own terms:

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“At first we thought that people would come to the club each month, but that hasn’t happened for a variety of reasons. We learnt that we have to be flexible and allow people to get involved in ways that suit them. It’s the same as the volunteer champions. We thought they would mentor or buddy people to volunteer, but that hasn’t really happened. We learnt that we can’t be prescriptive; the model can’t be too structured. It has to be flexible to meet different circumstances, otherwise it essentially goes against what we’re trying to do, which is address the barriers and encourage age-friendly volunteering principles. It’s the same with the volunteering opportunities, there’s been micro-volunteering at the events themselves, taster sessions or volunteering requiring more of a commitment, again to suit different circumstances.” Stakeholder

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“I liked that they encouraged you to consider lots of different opportunities. I didn’t want a big commitment, but I was happy to help out here and there, including in the community café. In the future I may want to do more and I know there’s opportunities available.” Volunteer club member

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**Enabled and supported:**

The model has ‘support’ built into it, through the roles of staff and volunteer champions to help people develop their interests, skills and confidence to volunteer, and support them on their volunteering journey:

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“We always knew that we’d be working with people that need to be supported into volunteering, building confidence to volunteer and hand holding. That’s one of the reasons we created the volunteer champion role, to provide support to club members, sharing their knowledge and experience, and in many ways our staff have acted like mentors to some people, giving quite intense advice and support.” Stakeholder

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“Everyone involved felt very supportive, the staff and the helpers. It was really good to meet some of them and I’ve kept in touch with them. They keep me up to date with different opportunities and I know they’re there if I need help or support.” Volunteer club member

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**Sociable and connected:**

The volunteer club sought to balance sociability without losing sight of promoting volunteering, appreciating the importance of building confidence and relationships:

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“Although we didn’t want the club confused with a social club, we knew it had to include fun and sociable elements. We held quizzes, cake making, decorating a heart, meditation activities, all to break the ice, to help people to have something to focus on and have something to occupy their hands, while they talk to those around them. We wanted to help people create connections, bond and grow in confidence so they might be able to volunteer in the future.” Stakeholder

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“I went to three or four of the clubs. It was good to meet people over a cup of coffee. I live on my own and it can be quite insular, so it is good to get out and it helps build your confidence.” Volunteer club member

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### **Valued and appreciated:**

The model included quarterly events to celebrate progress and success, so that club members and others involved felt valued and appreciated, helping to inspire and motivate:

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“ We always knew the importance of celebrating success, that’s why we built in regular celebratory events. We wanted to recognise progress and successes of both the club and its members, which we hoped would help motivate those that already volunteer and inspire others to volunteer.” Stakeholder

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“ I’ve been helping out at the café. They’re always really appreciative of the time you give. It makes you feel valued, which makes you feel good and want to go back to help more.” Volunteer club member

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### **Meaningful and purposeful:**

Volunteer club members provided examples of how attending the club, helping at the club and being supported into volunteering had given them a sense of purpose:

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“ My life had changed a lot and I needed something to do, to give me a purpose. Coming along to the club and being introduced to several volunteering opportunities really helped. I’ve volunteered in the café, at the club and also for another organisation. None of this would have happened if it wasn’t for attending the club, so I’m grateful to those involved. Volunteering helps give you something to organise your week around, and helps give meaning and a purpose to life.” Volunteer club member

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### **Makes good use of my strengths:**

The project promoted a variety of volunteering opportunities and sought to match people to opportunities that suited their circumstances and strengths:

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“ A lady had been volunteering with another charity that stopped operating and she came to us. She’d previously volunteered in a variety of roles including helping with administrative tasks and receptionist type roles. So we got her involved at the club, helping with meeting and greeting people and we matched her with a volunteer receptionist role at HVA and she’s been with us several months now.” Stakeholder

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“I’ve always done bits of volunteering. My job had ended, and quite a few things had changed in my life. I felt I had something to offer. The volunteer club came in handy at the right time in my life to give me some structure and focus. I like the way they introduced different volunteering opportunities through talks and sharing experiences, and you could pick and choose what you wanted to do depending on your interests and where you felt you could help. I signed up to a weekly reading project run by East Sussex Council to help adults with literacy problems.” Volunteer club member

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## What have been the impacts on individuals and organisations?

### Individuals

There are examples of **increasing the awareness of volunteering opportunities, improving the confidence of participants to volunteer and volunteers supported into a variety of roles**, including micro-volunteering at club events, taster sessions and more formal or longer-term options:

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“We have helped some people and there have been some successes, but perhaps it hasn’t reached as many people as we’d like nor seen as many people go on to volunteer, in whatever form that may take. However, we have managed to move some people on into volunteering and given more time I think we’d have been able to support others. We’ve offered a variety of opportunities and we have seen people volunteer at the club and café, get a taste of volunteering through taster sessions and several people have signed up to voluntary opportunities we’ve promoted through the club.” Stakeholder

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“In one of our first sessions, a lady from a volunteer gardening group came along, stood up, promoted their project and straightaway someone, a woman who was hard of hearing, stood up and said they wanted to get involved. It was an example of someone being inspired and getting involved, simply by promoting the club and giving projects the chance to share what they do with people that we’ve attracted to the club. And we’ve had people help out in the café, either at the club itself and/or at other times. There’s been lots of individual successes, that all add up to quite a lot.” Stakeholder

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Several volunteer members provided examples of **positive volunteering experiences**, to suit different circumstances, following participation in the volunteer club:

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“They [the volunteer club] helped me take up several volunteering opportunities. They told me what was available and encouraged me to sign up. And I helped out at a Christmas event, making tea. I enjoy volunteering and get a lot out of it. I like that they’ve stayed in touch with me and keep offering me opportunities to help out if I can.” Volunteer club member

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“I’ve really enjoyed volunteering. I didn’t realise there were so many local opportunities to volunteer and in different ways. I was wary about taking on too much, but you can do as much or as little as you want. I’ve volunteered in the café, which is something quite light touch. But I’ve also signed up to volunteer with an organisation, which will take up more of my time. There’s something available for everyone.” Volunteer club member

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There is also emerging evidence that attending the volunteer club and subsequently volunteering has **helped increase confidence, reduce social isolation and improve the physical and emotional well-being of members**:

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“It’s really helped me going to the club and volunteering. I needed to do something, to be out and about, be more active and meet new people because I was feeling very isolated. It helped increase my confidence and make me feel better about myself and life. I knew I needed to get myself back on track and that if I hadn’t done something now, I may never have done it. That way the timing of the club being available was really positive for me and I think it should carry on because it could help other people too.” Volunteer club member

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**Volunteer champions** also said that the project was having a **positive impact** on individuals, including themselves:

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“I enjoyed taking part and helping out. I think volunteering is important and I’m passionate about volunteering in later life, to keep you active and healthy. It’s helped me and I want to encourage others and help build up their confidence, so it can help them. We were just starting to gain momentum before the lockdown. I was starting to see examples of people beginning to volunteer and I found that rewarding. It was a positive experience for all of us involved. I hope we can pick up where we left off.” Volunteer Champion

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“I personally got quite a lot out of it [being a volunteer champion]. I helped at the club and the café. I spoke about my experience of volunteering and then I’ve been there to talk to people if they want. It kept me busy and active, which is important to me at the moment. I think volunteering is important for older people, so I was happy to share my experience, give something back and try to help others.” Volunteer Champion

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## Organisations

**The organisational health checks, and the associated age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, have been promoted amongst several local organisations and well received**, although there is potential for this part of the model to be further developed and implemented:

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“The health check was organised around the six principles, a way of organisations to self-assess if they are practising age-friendly volunteering. We used various opportunities to promote this to organisations, at our AGM in November and volunteer coordinators event in February. We also advertised it through our webpages, and in prototyping the health check we tried it out directly with some organisations. In the group sessions in November and February the health check was really well received. I was pleasantly surprised, the principles resonated, it did spark a lot of interest and conversations. People were thinking quite deeply and really reassessing whether what they did was appropriate or not. There is a chance to do more with this and to promote it more and help organisations embed it more, perhaps through following-up with organisations or specific workshops, and some organisations mentioned they were interested in the idea of a kitemark to demonstrate they are age-friendly.” Stakeholder

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**Several volunteer organisations and projects benefited from new volunteers supporting their projects:**

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“It’s always a challenge to get volunteers, especially older volunteers, so I think the idea of a volunteer club to encourage older people to volunteer is a really good idea. We always struggle to get volunteers and end up relying on a small number that then burn out. It means we can’t grow the project, meet demand and make the difference we’d like. I came along to the club to speak about my experience of volunteering and promote my project. We got one volunteer out of it, who has been really great for us and we also got a client garden to help improve.” Volunteer Champion and voluntary organisation

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## Hastings Voluntary Action

**HVA has become more aware of age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles** and is seeking to embed these across the organisation, its projects and in the local area:

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“Being part of the programme has helped us consider our approach to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering, and how the principles are embedded within our organisation and projects, and it’s probably moved us up a level. We know though that there’s more we can do to promote the principles within HVA and beyond.” Stakeholder

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HVA had a positive experience participating in the Age-Friendly and Inclusive Volunteering Grant Programme, which has helped **improve its capacity and approaches to project development, design and learning:**

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“We’ve really enjoyed being part of the programme, especially the chance to learn and develop. The programme has helped the way we do things, both our capacity and expertise around prototyping, project design, communications, developing our creative skills. We want to spread some of the learning around the whole organisation.” Stakeholder

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## What is the sustainability for the future?

**There is uncertainty about the future of the project and its long-term impact because of COVID-19**, which meant that the project had not fully completed and its benefits were not fully realised:

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“It is difficult to know about the future because of the current situation. Unfortunately it meant that we couldn’t hold the celebratory event in March and we haven’t been able to carry on the club for a further six months at the end of the programme as we’d hoped. It does feel like the project was prematurely ended [due to COVID-19] and we haven’t been able to see its full impact. I would like to continue with it, but I’m not sure at the moment if that will be possible and in what format.” Stakeholder

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However, prior to COVID-19, **HVA realised some funding to continue the project for a further six months, and similarly there was a commitment and desire from HVA to sustain it:**

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“ Before the virus we had a plan. We had permission to extend the age-friendly clubs for six months, which I thought would give us time to improve on what we’re doing, get better at it and embed it, and also give us space to look at continuation funding. Whatever happens, there’s more scope to do more around health checks and supporting organisations to be more age-friendly, which is something we can look to embed, mainstream and promote.” Stakeholder

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“ I think this whole thing has got legs. It would be a real shame if it died a death and wasn’t able to carry on anyway, because there’s a need. There’s been a lot of work that’s gone into it and lots set up, and it would be a shame if it didn’t carry on. At the very least, the champions are a future asset for us. We already knew them and worked with them, but those relationships have been strengthened and they can be called upon again.” Stakeholder

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**Volunteer champions expressed an interest in remaining involved** and continuing to help, support and mentor, which represents a potential future asset in the local area:

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“ Volunteering is a really positive experience, and the concept of age-friendly and inclusive volunteering is important. I’d like to stay involved, helping people to volunteer, working with HVA and sharing my experiences.” Volunteer Champion

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A positive by-product of COVID-19 and **a legacy of the project has been the establishment of a telephone support service** to help people during the crisis. The service was able to mobilise quickly using staff, volunteers and volunteer champions from the project. It provides a positive benefit to the local community now and beyond COVID-19, and it is also a source of future volunteering opportunities:

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“ The club and Central Hall has formed a basis for helping us set up a telephone befriending scheme during the lockdown, and this is something that we can build on. I’m not sure we’d have been able to set it up as quickly or as effectively without this project, our experience and the links we’d built up with other organisations, and future befrienders and befriended. For example, we were able to call on the enthusiasm and experience of our champions. They were

really keen to get involved. I see it as a legacy of the volunteer club. It is engaging with older people, and involves light touch volunteering, giving opportunities for people to volunteer, and it could be a great volunteering opportunity in the future. It also means we've stayed in touch with people and it will allow us to reconnect with them once we're over the virus, to either get people involved in the club or set something new up." Stakeholder

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"The virus got in the way of the club, which is a shame. But now I'm telephone befriending, which is also using my experience. I'm not sure I'd have got involved [in the telephone befriending] if I wasn't volunteering with HVA, the club and the café." Volunteer Champion

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# Case study



## **Volunteering for the first time - New beginnings, experiences and connections leading to a sense of self-worth, purpose and improved wellbeing**

Paul<sup>3</sup> was referred to the volunteer club because he wanted to stay active and develop his experience and skills so that he could gain employment:

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**“I’d deliberately been out of work for several years, but wanted to return to work. However, my skills are out of date, so I was referred to the club to volunteer to improve my CV. I’d never done volunteering before and I wasn’t sure what to expect.”**

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Paul attended the club and immediately begun micro-volunteering, both at the club and the café, providing a quick, easy and non-committal introduction into volunteering:

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**“I just like to roll my sleeves up and get involved, so I started making people teas and coffees at the club. This introduced me to the community café and so I also volunteer outside of the club at the café once a week. It was really easy to get involved and meant I could start getting on with it straightaway.”**

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Attending the club introduced Paul to other, more formal or longer-term volunteering opportunities, and the micro-volunteering gave him the confidence to sign up:

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**“I signed up to be a book ambassador, which is two hours a week, and also to a gardening project once a week, where we tidy up people’s gardens. Going to the club and helping out gave me the confidence to get more involved and I wouldn’t have known about these opportunities if it wasn’t for the volunteer club.”**

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<sup>3</sup> This is a pseudonym.



Paul said that volunteering has been a positive experience, positively impacting on his skills, social connections and physical and emotional well-being:

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**“The club has been really good for me, helping me get involved in all these volunteering opportunities. I’ve never volunteered before, but I’m really enjoying it. It keeps me active and out of trouble. I’m trying to organise something for most days of the week, so that I have a purpose and have something which is a reason to get out of the house and do something positive. I’ve enjoyed coming to the club and meeting new people and doing new things, and it’s the same with all the volunteering. And you get free tea! It’s helping me brush up on my skills as well as making me feel good about life and meeting new people. I’m quite surprised about how much I’ve got out of it.”**

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The value of Paul’s volunteering has been recognised by those around him:

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**“Paul is great. He’s got really involved. He attends all of the club sessions and helps out. He’s volunteered for several activities and projects. You know that you can really rely on him and he’s a positive person to have around. I think the club has had a real impact on him, and he’s had a positive impact on it.”**  
Stakeholder

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**“Paul is now one of our main and best volunteers. I’m not sure what I’d do without him. You can really rely on him and he’s able to do it all himself. You can leave him at a garden and know he’ll have finished the job. I’m very grateful that we found him at the volunteering club and that he signed up to help us. It is difficult to get volunteers and I’m lucky that we’ve found someone that is this good, reliable and committed.”** Stakeholder/volunteer champion/volunteer project

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# Conclusion

The Hastings Age-Friendly Volunteering project highlights the potential benefits of a multi-faceted approach. This model combines a sociable age-friendly volunteering club, predominantly co-located at a volunteering hub and community café to provide immediate volunteering opportunities, and volunteer champions to inspire, inform and support older people interested in volunteering. This model helps overcome barriers by applying age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, and support people into a variety of volunteering opportunities that suit their circumstances.

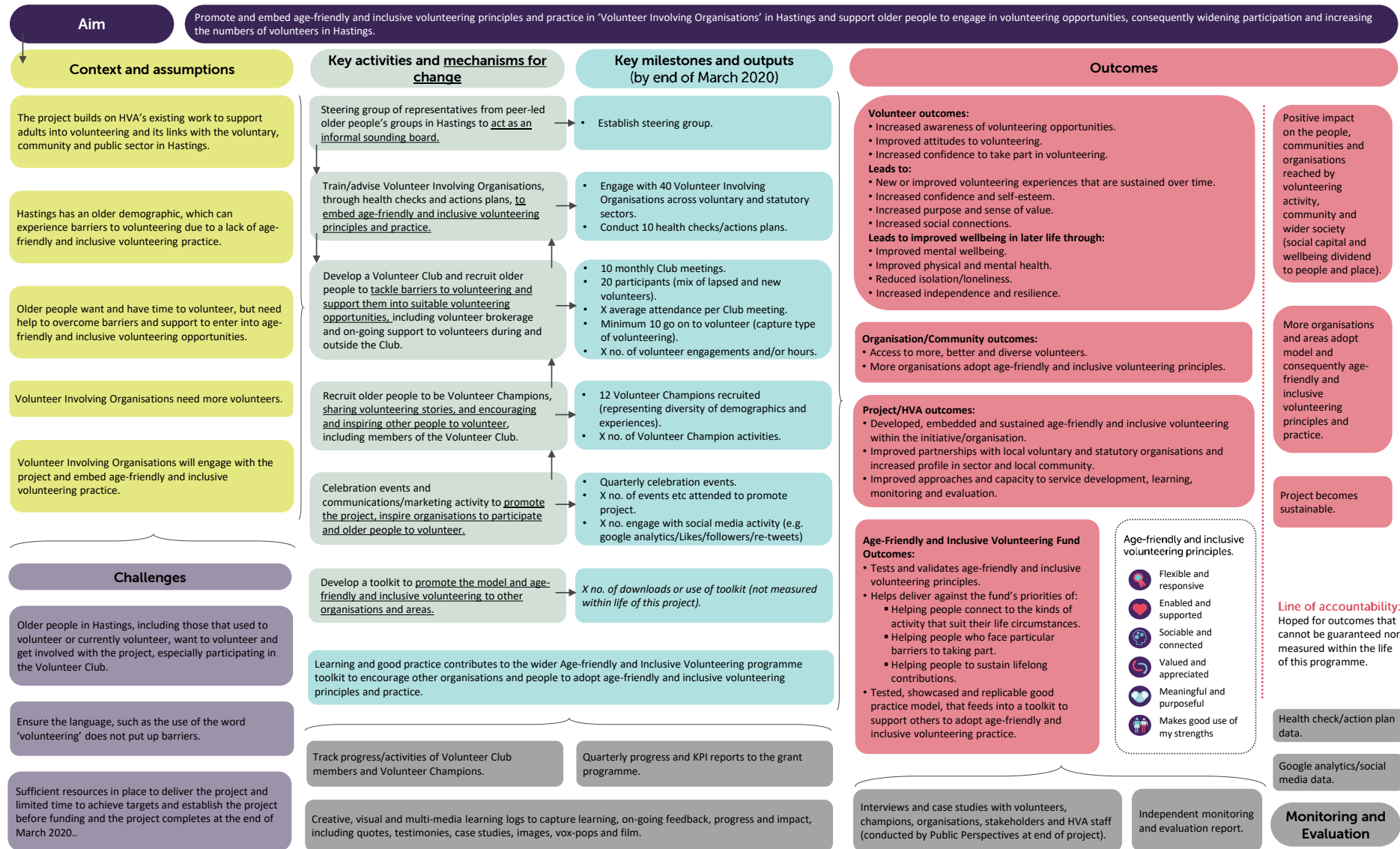
The project has learnt that flexibility has to be central to the model in all its aspects, from allowing people to participate in the club on their own terms, to the support the club provides its members and ultimately to the volunteering opportunities offered to members. These opportunities include micro-volunteering at the club and outside of the club in the co-located community café and elsewhere, taster volunteering sessions, as well as more formal or longer-term options, often promoted through talks at the club. This approach helps provide choice, flexibility and allows people to engage in volunteering to suit their circumstances.

The model has shown, where it has successfully engaged with people, that it can help increase social connections, reduce isolation and loneliness, and help improve self-esteem and confidence, both through engaging in the club itself and participating in subsequent volunteering opportunities. This in turn can potentially help improve emotional and physical well-being.

The project had challenges attracting people that are perhaps below the radar and not currently engaged with the community and voluntary sector in the area, but whom may still be interested in volunteering and would benefit from the opportunity that volunteering provides. Some of these challenges are simply about time, expertise and effective marketing. Others are about the use of language and how the club is presented so that it does not put people off in the early stages of engagement, including people that may not be considering volunteering at the point they are engaged. The challenge is getting the right balance between being overt, promoting a volunteering club and promoting a social club, where volunteering is subtly introduced over time.

In addition, the model has the potential to promote age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practices amongst local organisations through the use of organisational 'health checks'. These have been well received and resonate amongst local voluntary organisations, and have the potential to be scaled-up and followed-up to extend reach and impact.

# Appendix: Hastings Voluntary Action Theory of Change



Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.  
**Let's make ageing better.**



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