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26

Community networking event at No 34.



MEMBER SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

Community People undertook its 2026 Member Survey to better understand the experiences, priorities and challenges of local charities, voluntary organisations and community groups. The survey explored members' satisfaction with Community People, the current operating environment for the voluntary sector, awareness of available services, and areas where additional support would be most valuable.

The findings provide an important snapshot of the local voluntary and community sector at a time of increasing demand and continuing financial pressures. They also highlight the positive impact Community People continues to have in supporting organisations across the area.

WHO RESPONDED?

The survey received 39 responses from a broad range of local charities and community organisations, representing different sizes, services, and communities across the area.



01. STRONG SATISFACTION AND TRUST

Community People continues to have a strong reputation, when asked how likely you are to recommend us to a colleague, Community People scored 8.9 out of 10.

Members described Community People as a “brilliant asset,” “invaluable” and “the backbone of the community.” Networking, forums, practical advice, one-to-one support and connecting organisations were the most valued areas.

One respondent said Community People is at its best when it brings organisations together and helps them “learn, grow and work collaboratively.” This reflects the value members place on our supportive, approachable and relationship-based way of working.

When are Community People at their best?

“Community people are a very approachable and personable organisation.”

“Training and networking, you’re awesome!”

“Help with finding volunteers”



“Bringing people together”



“Advocating for small charities and helping people change lives and outcomes.”

“In person networking events”



Community Networking event East Grinstead



02. SECTOR UNDER PRESSURE

Many member organisations are working in an increasingly difficult environment. Although some reported stable or slightly increased income, this has not removed the pressure caused by rising costs, restricted funding and growing demand for services.

Members highlighted challenges including higher staffing, fuel and building costs, fewer repeat grants, difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers and difficulty securing funding for core running costs. At the same time, demand for health, care and community support continues to increase, placing additional pressure on already stretched teams.

One organisation reported:

“Demand for care is up by more than 40%.”

This suggests that organisations may be receiving slightly more income while still becoming less financially secure. Costs and demand are rising, but funding is not always increasing at the same pace.

41%

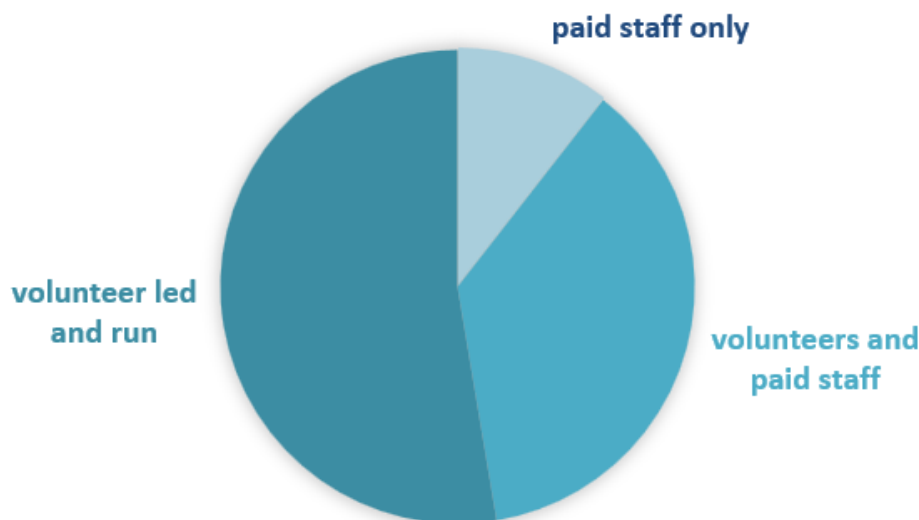
Fundraising is harder or much harder



54%

Reported increased income, mostly only slightly

03. VOLUNTEER CHALLENGES



Although 82% of organisations rely on volunteers and recruitment and retention remain major challenges. Members are particularly struggling to find skilled volunteers, trustees and people willing to take on leadership roles. National trends show a similar spike in formal volunteering over Covid, with a national reduction from 45% to 25% over a decade.

(<https://www.plinth.org.uk/debates/volunteering-crisis>)

This is limiting growth and placing more pressure on existing staff and volunteers. It can lead to a few people taking on large burdens which can eventually lead to burn out for leaders, and groups having to close. For smaller organisations, the issue is not only finding people who want to help, but finding those who are willing to take responsibility and commit regularly. Again this is a trend seen across the country where people are more likely to want to volunteer 'informally' as and when they can rather than 'formal' regular, committed roles. In addition there are growing numbers of young people wanting to volunteer. In order to work with people in a more flexible way, we may need to look at new roles and ways of working with volunteers going forward.

"A challenge - finding suitable volunteers who actually help with running the organisation"

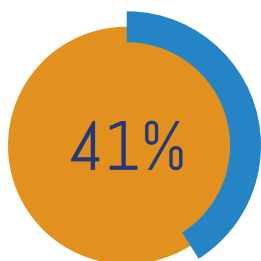
"Volunteer recruitment is perhaps the hardest nut to crack, but it's an issue for all of us."



"I feel that the response is always already there, we certainly couldn't ask or expect more from them, amazing group of very hard working people, who care about community driven projects and initiatives in the area. We are very lucky."



04. FUNDING CHALLENGES



41% of respondents said raising money had become harder or much harder, although 54% organisations reported some increase in income. Most increases were only slight, suggesting that higher income is not necessarily keeping pace with rising costs and demand.

Members highlighted several recurring problems:

- Fewer grants and repeat-funding opportunities
- Difficulty securing unrestricted or core funding
- Increased competition between organisations
- Rising staffing, fuel, maintenance and building costs
- Limited time and capacity to complete applications
- Funding criteria that can disadvantage smaller or founder-led groups

One respondent explained: *"Donors and grants prefer to fund a specific item rather than general support. This has become more challenging year on year."*

Another reported that: *"Trust and Grant funds are less and not offering repeat funding."*

Members showed strong demand for support with identifying suitable funding opportunities, improving applications and building connections with funders and local businesses. Community People use this information to represent members' needs and encourage funders to offer more flexible, multi-year core funding, reducing the pressure of repeated applications and reporting. We also offer several opportunities during the year to connect in person with local and national funders at our very popular networking events.

Community People's one-to-one funding support was highly valued, particularly feedback on applications. This provides an opportunity to expand workshops, application reviews and connections with funders and local businesses.

"Raising money is a challenge!"

"Trust and Grant funds are less and not offering repeat funding."



Welcome to Eastern Road Local Nature Reserve



Eastern Road Local Nature Reserve
This is a 1.5-acre reserve which has been donated to the community by the local landowner. It is situated on the eastern edge of the town of Lindfield and is a valuable addition to the local wildlife and flora.

History
The reserve was donated to the community by the local landowner in 1977. It was previously used as a private garden and was a valuable addition to the local wildlife and flora.

Flora and Fauna
The reserve is home to a variety of plants and animals. It is a valuable addition to the local wildlife and flora.



Management
The reserve is managed by the local landowner. It is a valuable addition to the local wildlife and flora.



Get Involved
The reserve is open to the public. It is a valuable addition to the local wildlife and flora.



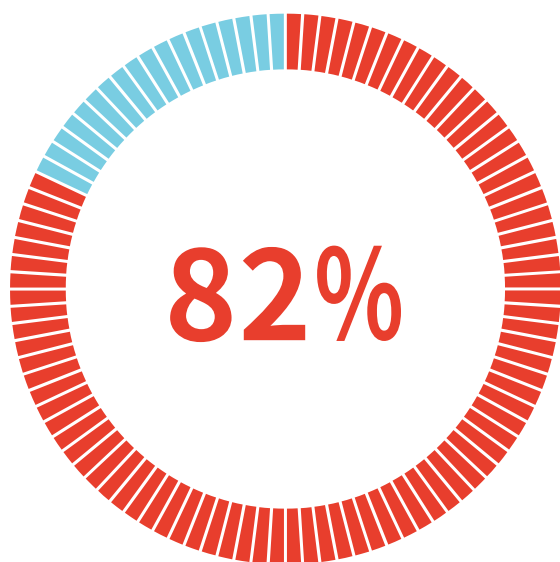
Eastern Road Nature Reserve

05. MEMBERS WANT PRACTICAL TRAINING THAT FITS AROUND THEM

Members are looking for training they can apply immediately. Top training asks from respondents were:

- Marketing, social media, promotion including Canva
- Governance, safeguarding and compliance
- Volunteer, staff and organisational management

Interest is high, but timing can be a barrier. Volunteers and trustees may struggle to attend sessions during working hours, so evening workshops, online options and earlier notice could make training more accessible.



82% respondents had already attended Community People training or said they would do in the future. This shows strong demand for future training.



“We would welcome opportunities for shared learning and training around good governance, inclusive practice and supporting positive organisational culture within VCSE organisations”

“Creating posters is a chore. We have a free Canva licence, but haven't had the time to get my head around it.”



Volunteers at The Cherry Tree Centre

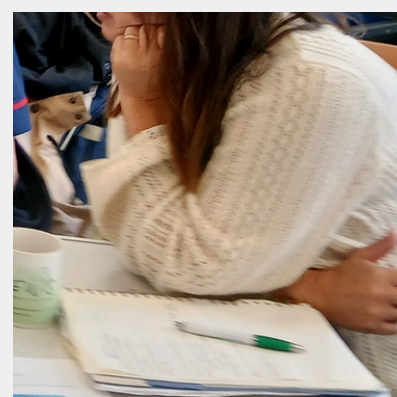
06. WHAT MEMBERS VALUE AND OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW

Members value Community People for its ability to convene organisations, bring people together, share local knowledge and create opportunities for collaboration. Its practical and responsive support is especially appreciated when organisations need advice, useful connections or guidance on their next steps. The survey also highlights clear opportunities to build on these strengths.

Community People could make its full range of services more visible, strengthen support for volunteer recruitment and retention, and develop stronger links with funders and local businesses. Offering training at more flexible times, including online or evening sessions, could also help more volunteers and trustees take part.

These improvements would respond directly to the challenges members raised while strengthening Community People's role as a convener and connector across the VCSE sector, while protecting the supportive and relationship-based approach members value most.

Community People Health Forum



CONCLUSION

The survey shows that Community People is highly valued for bringing organisations together, sharing local knowledge and providing practical, approachable support. Members clearly trust the organisation and see it as an important part of the local voluntary and community sector.

The findings also highlight growing pressures around funding, volunteer recruitment, rising costs and increasing demand for services. These challenges can affect organisations' ability to grow, develop services and respond fully to community needs.

Community People is well placed to build on its existing strengths by making its full range of services more visible, strengthening support for volunteer recruitment and retention, and developing stronger links with funders and local businesses. More flexible training options could also help more volunteers and trustees access support.

Community People also has an important role as a voice for the VCSE sector, making sure the experiences, challenges and impact of local organisations are heard by decision-makers, partners and the wider community. By telling the story of how vital the VCSE sector is across civil society, Community People can help raise awareness of the sector's contribution and advocate for the support it needs.

Overall, the survey provides a strong foundation for future development. By continuing to listen to members and respond to their changing needs, Community People can strengthen its role as a trusted connector, advocate and source of practical support.



We are Community People

We are a charity on a mission to support our communities to thrive.

For us: **it's all about people.**

People coming together to act on what's important to them.

People having access to health, wellbeing, justice, and opportunity.

People being heard across all our communities.

People being given the tools and platforms to pursue their passions and make a positive impact in their communities.

We **champion** the role of community organisations and the people who power them. We **collaborate** with other community organisations, businesses, public sector and individuals, supporting them to do work that drives positive and long-lasting social change.



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